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Oh, Say, Can You See?

By David Taylor

Subtitle for this one should be "Editor Gets Comeuppance." What happened was this: I went down to Jacksonville, Fla., for July's Great American Fish Count with co-founder of REEF, Ned DeLoach, and his family. Naturally, I didn't take a fish ID book. Or brush up on tropical Atlantic species. Hey, I'm a hot-shot magazine editor. Been there, seen that. I can rattle off grunts and grouper, wrasses and rays with the best of 'em. Even if they are at "Amberjack Hole," a site about 20 miles off the north Florida coast.

Beautiful day—griddle flat seas, water temp 80F on the surface, about 74F down on the sandy bottom at 90 feet. Vis about 45 feet. And lots of life. We scared off a few turtles as we descended through a haze of mackerel scad. Past the thermocline at 40 feet the vis broke clear over the live bottom—limestone ledges with enough relief to support the bottom rung of a reef-type ecosystem: sponges, corals, critters. With strobe powered up, I started snapping shots of the usual suspects: barracuda idling in the water column, big blue angels flitting through the porous ledge, scamps eyeing me for a speargun, and out in the green haze—a small nurse shark.

Ho hum, just another day at the office.

My dive partner Nick Lucey worked dutifully filling out the official Fish Count ID card. One of RSD's most experienced travel writers, I knew Nick had seen it all before, too. At the safety stop we got a small thrill—the cloud of scad was now being corralled by Atlantic bottle-nosed dolphin and swirled madly around us, shifting together like the slats of a venetian blind. Back on board, Nick and I agreed: Decent dive. Nick's fish list jibed with my photos: we'd seen most of the same old stuff.

Then we heard the racket at the back of the boat. The DeLoaches and Fish Count volunteers were up the dive ladder, spitting out their regs and chatting excitedly in phrases like: "I couldn't believe it!" "Did you see that?" "A new species!"

Nick and I angled back to the small crowd comparing their underwater ID slates. A quick glance at the closest ones confirmed that their lists were longer than Nick's or mine. Well, OK—a lot longer. Then Ned DeLoach—co-author with Paul Humann of the most popular series of fish identification books ever written—said something that stunned me: "Did anyone recognize that porgy? Anyone know what it is?"

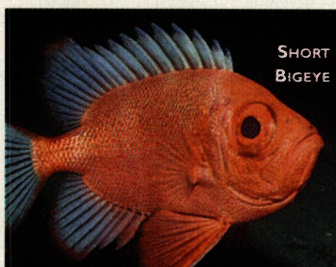
Ahem. You mean someone who has been diving 30 years, who is one of the world's tropical fish identification experts, had

seen something new down there?

Anna, Ned's wife, then informed the group that the dwarf goatfish everyone (but Nick and me) had seen in the sand was a new species for her Life List—her 303rd. As the sharing of sightings continued—a two-spot cardinalfish with a jaw full of eggs, a previously unobserved behavior of a cubbyu cleaning a sheepshead, a short bigeye usually found only in deeper water—Nick and I exchanged puzzled glances. Had we been on the same dive site as these excited fish ID'ers? How had we missed all of this?

In retrospect, the answer is painfully obvious. Yes, we had been on the same dive site, but with radically different attitudes, skills and, as a result, outcomes. Not only had the volunteers seen more down there, they had enjoyed it more. From old salts like DeLoach to his new diver son-in-law Eric, their excitement was equally genuine and infusive, fueled by the thrill of discovery and commitment to their mission—the data they generate are urgently needed by marine scientists and sanctuary managers.

These fish identifiers also represent something important for the future of scuba diving. Too many become certified, experience the thrill of weightlessness and the beauty of a

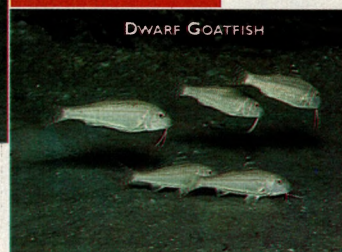


SHORT BIGEYE



LONGSPINE PORGY

Just a few of the species Taylor did not see.



DWARF GOATFISH

reef, then move on, like tourists herding past the Grand Canyon. But these fish count divers are a different breed, one whose commitment to the sport extends beyond its gadgets and machismo, the lure of tropical getaways and water fun. For them, scuba is a means to an end, a gateway to a new world teeming with undiscovered life. And from it they take away not merely sybaritic pleasures, but a new appreciation of creation and their place in it. As Anna DeLoach said to me, "When you do this, there's no such thing as a boring dive."

All I have to do is learn to see.

Eye Openers

For information on how you can become a fish-count volunteer or for a location where you can take a reef fish identification course, call REEF (Reef Environmental Education Foundation) at (305) 451-0312, check out their web site at www.reef.org, or call New World Publications at (904) 737-6558. See also this issue's "Test Your REEF I.Q." on page 77.

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Photograph by Steve Simonsen. Shot on Anse Chastanet Reef, St. Lucia; diving courtesy Scuba St. Lucia and Anse Chastanet Hotel. Model Stephen Prosterman is diving supervisor of the Marine Science Center, University of St. Thomas.

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SCUBALAB DIRECTOR Jon Hardy
ASSOCIATE EDITORS Nick Lucey, Keith Phillips
ASSISTANT EDITOR Patricia Wuest
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Belinda F. Triplett
RECEPTIONIST Bobbie Disley
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FIELD EDITORS John Francis, Ventura, CA; Bob Friel, Miami, FL; Paul Kvinta, Atlanta, GA; Lance Leonhardt, Whitehall, PA; Bucky McMahon, Atlantic Beach, FL; Karen Shelanski, New York, NY; Samuel Shelanski, New York, NY; Franklin Viola, Atlanta, GA

ART DIRECTOR Janice Shay
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR Ann Geisinger
ART INTERN Lorrie Tewell
CONTRIBUTORS Curtis Boggs, Chris Crumley, Paul Humann, Alex Kirkbride, Mark M. Lawrence, Amos Nachoum, M. Timothy O'Keefe, Doug Perrine, Steve Simonsen, Wes Skiles, Marty Snyderman

ONLINE EDITOR Laura Cook-Smith
ONLINE DESIGNER Iris A. Mekker

MAIN EDITORIAL & ADVERTISING OFFICE
6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405
(912) 351-0855, Fax: (912) 351-0735
e-mail address: RSDmgzn@aol.com
World Wide Web: <http://www.scubadiving.com/>

PUBLISHER Dane B. Farnum
PROMOTION MANAGER Susan W. Smith
ADVERTISING ARTIST Jessica A. Benton
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Kevin R. Whitworth
BILLING COORDINATOR Colleen Abruzzi
CONSUMER MARKETING MANAGER Laura Chiles
SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES MANAGER Michele Steele
DIRECT SALES MANAGER Charlotte M. Walker
DIRECTOR, RETAIL SALES Chuck Tripp
V.P., RODALE ACTIVE TITLES Peter Spiers

SALES OFFICES

CALIFORNIA Andrew Wiens, 48 Glen Summer Rd., Pasadena, CA 91105 (818) 577-8768, Fax: (818) 568-1964; e-mail: a7wiens@aol.com; Debbie Edwards, 800 Silverado #305, La Jolla, CA 92037 (619) 551-0430, Fax: (619) 551-0615, e-mail: DE rsdmag@aol.com; Rhonda Messex, Sales Assistant
GEORGIA 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405 (912) 351-0855, Fax: (912) 351-0890 Dane B. Farnum, Publisher (912) 351-6233, Jan Siplon (912) 351-6224, e-mail: JBrittRSD@aol.com; Laura Settles & Rhonda Messex, Sales Assistants
DETROIT Dave McAfee, 901 Wilshire Dr., Ste. 300, Troy, MI 48084 (810) 269-8880, Fax: (810) 269-8886
EMMAUS, PA Cheryl Haughney, 33 E. Minor St., Emmaus, PA 18098 (610) 967-8211, Fax: (610) 967-7793, e-mail: chaughn1@rodalepress.com; Alison DelRe, Sales Assistant

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Letters

A Lesson in Sexism

In "The Missing Third" (RSD, June '97), Jon Hardy states that three "female" divers were involved in an accident. Why is it important to know the gender of the divers? Gender does not seem to have been a factor in the accident, yet this conclusion could be implied. Drawing attention to their gender is just as inappropriate as if you had written "three white divers" or "three Asian divers."

ANN GEIGER
PASADENA, CALIF.

to remind you to take your anti-malarial and two Gurkha bodyguards in case of tribal warfare."

If you missed any of the articles referred to in these letters, you can find them on the RSD web site at www.scubadiving.com.

I've seen many instances of divers showing tremendous sensitivity to underwater ecology, yet extreme insensitivity to local residents. Local dive masters, captains and their helpers risk health and well-being to assist visiting divers for small pay. The least we can do is show some cultural sensitivity.

SEAN BRUNER
TUCSON, ARIZ.

dents on how to be better consumers. I particularly appreciate his point that the quality of the course is much more important than its cost. Too many students choose the cheapest course without understanding the potential cost to their diving skills and safety.

Hardy also states that it is important to find out what is extra and what is included, but he fails to caution that "included" can have a hidden meaning. Some dive centers and instructors cut the cost of their course by lending students a textbook and dive planner. Technically, these items are included but the student does not own them unless they're purchased separately. Instructors who do not give students at least a dive planner as part of their course are sacrificing their students' safety for profit margin. Among the questions every student should ask is, "Do I get to keep my dive planner and textbook?"

BOB KERN
HONOLULU, HAWAII

A Lesson in Racism

I'm not generally a stickler for political correctness, but the following quote from "15 Dive Wonders" (June '97) made me wince: "Sherpa Factor: You'll want one

Dive Instruction's Hidden Cost

I would like to thank Jon Hardy for his article "How to Find a Good Instructor" (June '97) for educating potential stu-

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Letters

Big Is Not Better

I like to find small dive resorts that are not well-known and not able to promote themselves. Is it possible to have a monthly review of a small dive resort unable to promote itself in your magazine? It seems your reader survey is designed to show who is rated best according to the number of responses received, giving the advantage to the larger resorts. Why not pro-rate the response based on the number of rooms?

ROBERT HARRINGTON

VIA E-MAIL

Ed.'s note: The results of our reader ratings are not based on the number of responses received. Readers use a five-point scale (poor to outstanding) to evaluate the dive operator or resort. A minimum number of responses is required to ensure statistical validity, but having more than the minimum number of responses does not guarantee a better score.

Equalizing Made Easier

Regarding the "5 Golden Rules of Equalizing" (May '97), I'd like to suggest a sixth: The very best way to avoid equalization problems is to start equalizing about one half hour before the dive. Every few minutes pinch your nose and blow gently until your eardrums react. It's easy to do and you'll be pleased with the results.

STAN CAMPBELL
CINCINNATI, OHIO

Clarification

A sidebar in our review of mail-order regulators (RSD, July '97) stated that International Divers Inc. no longer manufactures the regulator reviewed as the Blue Reef

Air Plus, distributed by Leisure Pro. IDI no longer manufactures the regulator to sell under its own label, but does manufacture it on a private-label basis for Leisure Pro. 

RECALL: SCUBAPRO G-500 REGULATOR

Scubapro, a division of Johnson Worldwide Associates Inc., is recalling about 1,800 G500 second stage regulators. The VIVA control knobs on these regulators can detach during a dive allowing water to rush into the regulator, which could result in a diver drowning.

The G500 second stage regulators involved in this recall have serial numbers less than or equal to 13497450. The serial number is located on the bottom face of the exhaust manifold. These products were sold in dive stores nationwide from March 1997 through June 1997 for around \$300.

Consumers should immediately stop using G500 second stage regulators involved in this recall and contact their local authorized Scubapro dealer to arrange for a free replacement of the VIVA control knob. All other questions should be directed to Scubapro at (800) 467-2822. Under no circumstances should consumers dive with these regulators until they have been repaired.



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BOOK IT! Group leaders call for "Rent The Entire Resort" details. An individual seven-night package is \$725 pp/do; non-divers, \$650 pp/do. Call your local dive shop or Bay Islands Beach Resort toll-free at (800) 4 ROATAN or (561) 624-5774, fax (561) 624-7751.

SEAVIEWS

—Edited by Keith Phillips

► COUSTEAU'S LEGACY

"You all now have the duty."

In January, Jacques-Yves Cousteau flew to Orlando, Fla., to accept a lifetime achievement award from the U.S. recreational diving industry. During the presentation, in words that now sound prescient, the man who co-invented the Aqua-Lung and popularized underwater exploration urged divers to carry on his work of the past four decades: alert the world to the beauty and vulnerability of the oceans.

"The future of civilization depends on water. I beg you all to understand this," he said. "You all now have the duty, you have the time, to convince people."

Within weeks of the speech, Cousteau was hospitalized with a respiratory ailment he would battle for months. On June 25, 1997, just two weeks past his 87th birthday, Cousteau died at his Paris home. His passing marked the end of an era, but, thankfully, not of his monumental legacy.

"Captain Cousteau has returned to the 'Silent World,' but his voice will continue to be heard," promises his widow, Francine, who will continue the captain's work as director of the Cousteau Society. "For many years, we have envisioned the future of his work."

Throughout his life, Cousteau was an outspoken advocate of marine conservation with an eye toward how current actions affect future generations. His 400-page memoir, *The Man, the Octopus and the Orchid*, published just six days after his death, warns of planetary devastation and accuses world leaders of squandering the environment. "They pocket benefits without looking ahead and write checks our descendants will pay for in the centuries to come," he wrote.

In a 1995 interview with *RSD*, he advocated an international Bill of Rights for Future Generations, aimed at preventing irreversible environmental damage (see "Cousteau: The Interview," *RSD*, Nov./Dec. '95). The following year, he turned the accidental sinking of his famed ship *Calypso* into a \$20 million campaign to build *Calypso II*—a futuristic flagship for a new generation of exploration.

Also before his death, Cousteau reconciled years of legal and personal disputes with his son, Jean-Michel, involving the Cousteau Society and use of the family name. The two had resumed speaking, and Jean-Michel visited his father during his illness. "To me he gave not only guidance, but my life's work, instilling in me since childhood a love for the sea and a profound respect for the marvels of life on our entire water planet. For that, I am eternally grateful," says Jean-Michel.

Jacques-Yves Cousteau was born June 11, 1910, in Saint-Andre-de-Cubzac near Bordeaux. Although a sickly child, he learned to swim at age 4. As a 26-year-old French naval officer, posted near Toulon in 1936, Cousteau and civilian Frederic Dumas experimented with watertight goggles to improve underwater vision.

Cousteau fashioned a waterproof housing and filmed what he saw under water. Determined to dive deeper, stay down longer and see more, Cousteau and engineer Emile Gagnan designed and patented a device known as the Aqua-Lung. Cousteau began testing the device in 1943, and three years later it became the first commercially available scuba regulator.

In 1950, Cousteau formed the first of a series of organizations through which he financed diving expeditions aboard the converted minesweeper *Calypso*. Logging more than 1 million miles on more than 80 expeditions worldwide, Cousteau produced 65 films. His 1956 feature *The Silent World* was awarded at both the Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Awards, and the 1953 book of the same name has sold 5 million copies in more than 20 languages. In the 1960s, Cousteau began producing television programs that for many were the first look at what lived in the oceans.

During his years of exploration, Cousteau also documented threats to the underwater environment. "The oceans are in danger of dying," he declared in 1970, and four years later he founded the Cousteau Society to promote conservation. Throughout his life he protested environmental threats ranging from overfishing to nuclear bomb tests in the South Pacific.

"We have lost a champion for our oceans. I hope his passing will inspire others to take up the case of protecting our world's oceans," says marine scientist Dr. Sylvia Earle.

—KAREN SHELANSKI



► MARINE CONSERVATION

Turtle S-Oops

The publishers of the *Joy of Cooking* have added a bit of good taste to their famous cookbook by removing a recipe for green sea turtle soup.

The entry under the heading "Turtles and Terapin" has been in the famous cookbook for decades but only recently drew protests from conservationists. All species of sea turtles are listed as either endangered or threatened and are protected by law in the United States and many other countries, as well as by international treaties.

The entry called turtles "peaceable and sagacious" reptiles. But since "handling and cooking of these monsters ... is not a usual household procedure ... most of us are content to enjoy their highly prized gelatinous meat ready-diced and in cans." Nonetheless, there were instructions for keeping, killing, sectioning and cooking a turtle, and also for livening up canned and frozen turtle meat. (It even recommends sherry as an accompaniment.)

"The problem with this book is they kept adding to it and they were loath to cut things," says Beth Wareham, a spokeswoman for Simon & Schuster, the publisher of the hardcover edition of the *Joy of Cooking*. There hasn't been a revision of the book since 1975, one year after the turtle was added to the endangered species list.

"Just by looking at the publishing date, we knew it had just

been overlooked," said David Godfrey, spokesman for the Sea Turtle Survival League, the division of the Caribbean Conservation Corporation which brought the distasteful recipe to the publisher's attention.

The complaint quickly became food for thought in the publishing world and recipes for bear and bear cub, porcupine and muskrat were also removed. In an unusual move, the publisher of the paperback *Joy of Cooking* also deleted turtle recipes from its new edition, even though paperbacks generally run one printing behind hardcover editions.

"In the '30s and '40s in this country you could buy green turtle soup in a can," Wareham notes. "That's probably why they're endangered now."

—KAREN SHELANSKI



STEVE GRAY

Free Diving

500 Feet and 90 Miles

On May 31, Francisco "Pipin" Ferreras rode a weighted sled down to 500 feet off Grand Cayman. The Cuban-born Pipin holds the "no limits" free-diving world record at 439 feet on one breath of air but extended his range for this dive with a little mid-flight refueling. After hurtling to 250 feet, Pipin took another breath from a Spare Air and continued down to 500.

"Doctors said it would be impossible" to take the second breath, says Pipin, who routinely dives his sled past depths where just a few years ago it was thought no human could survive. Shrugging off the medical advice—and the critics who claim his dives are more stunt than sport—Pipin says, "I am more interested in pushing the limits of the human being and discovering our aquatic potential."

But this latest dive almost didn't happen. A week earlier, after a practice free dive and then a bounce dive on scuba to help raise the sled, Pipin fell on his head during the boat ride back to shore. He experienced seizures and doctors feared barotrauma or decompression sickness. He was rushed to an intensive care unit in Miami where a few days—and a \$22,000 hospital bill later—the seizures were blamed on the knock to the head.

For the two-breath plunge, Pipin dropped off the stern of the *Cayman Aggressor* holding station just south of George Town Harbor. Safety divers were staggered every 100 feet down to 400 and two submersibles carrying journalists hovered at 300 and 500 feet. Originally targeting 600 feet, Pipin decided to limit this attempt to 500. On reaching his target depth, Pipin inflated a lift bag and blew to the surface like a Polaris missile. Total dive time: three minutes, 18 seconds.

Pipin's next challenge is a dive into the shark-infested waters of Hollywood. He's in L.A. to work as consultant, stunt diver and dive trainer on a film based on his life story—*90 Miles*, the distance between Castro-controlled Cuba and the U.S. "It is like *Big Blue* plus political intrigue," says Pipin.

—BOB FRIEL



ANNE DAVID-HASSON

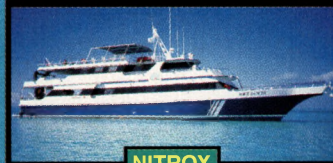
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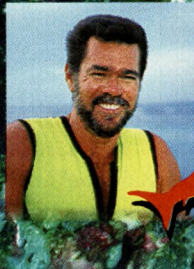


Star Dancer - Papua New Guinea



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► DIVING AND DRAWING

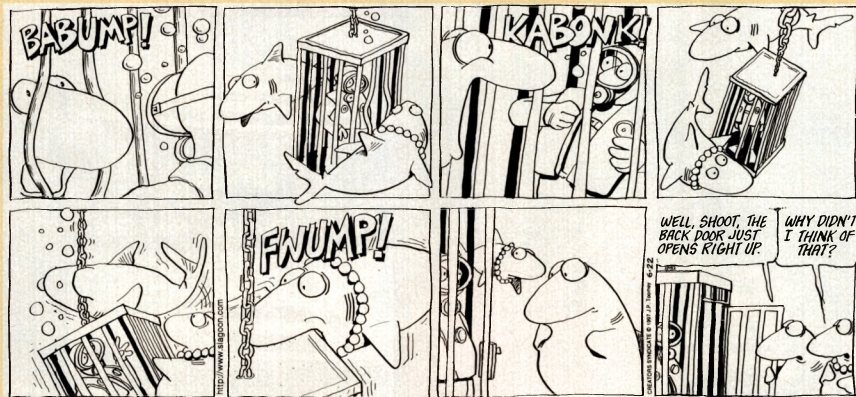
A Shark Named Sherman



In beautiful Kapupu Lagoon, roughly 250 nautical miles south-southeast of Gilligan's Island, lives a great white shark named Sherman. Sherman is the Homer Simpson of the sea whose lack of ambition is matched only by his sloth and gluttony. When he's not lazing around on the bottom, Sherman is chomping on everything from popsicles to poodles, Cheez Wiz, gummy bears, doughnuts and divers.

In beautiful San Francisco, roughly 320 miles north-northwest of LaLa Land, lives cartoonist Jim Toomey. When Jim isn't working on his daily comic strip, *Sherman's Lagoon*, he's busy planning dive vacations or eating Cheez Wiz and gummy bears.

"I began diving at 12 and was always fascinated with sharks," says Toomey, now 36. "I came up with a Sherman-like character back then and finally gave him his own strip in 1991." Toomey, a former political cartoonist, says Sherman is a natural protagonist for the comics. "There's a certain amount of baggage that



comes from being a shark—we all expect certain behavior from them—so having my lead character imbued with all the qualities of a great white and being lazy and rather dim-witted gives me a lot of opportunity for humor."

The eclectic mix of supporting seafood that fill the lagoon with laughs includes a philosophical sea turtle named Fillmore as Sherman's straight man, an ornery hermit crab named Hawthorne who hasn't seen a human butt that didn't need a good pinching, and the unfortunately named "Bob," the antisocial bottom dweller.

And people? "In the lagoon they're known as hairless beach apes," says Toomey. "They provide laughs and occasionally snacks for Sherman." Aside from the usual lagoon activities like mooning underwater photographers, the Kapupuan critters partake in a long-running battle to keep the beach apes from despoiling their tropical paradise. "The main emphasis is on making the strip fun, but every now and then it's nice to slip in a subtle message about overfishing and other conservation topics."

"Our members really enjoy Jim's strip," says Stephen Colwell, executive director of The Coral Reef Alliance. "We run *Sherman's Lagoon* in every issue of our newsletter and it's very popular. It makes you laugh and think at the same time without beating you over the head on issues."

"If there's any mission to the strip, it's to give a human face to the undersea characters and maybe encourage some empathy for fish," says Toomey. "Marine mammals are easy to relate with, it's the fish that need better PR." —BOB FRIEL

Sherman's Lagoon is featured daily in 120 newspapers. An anthology of strips—Sherman's Lagoon: Ate That, What's Next?—is due out in September by Andrews & McMeel. Web divers can visit the Lagoon at <http://www.slagoon.com>.

► READER POLL

Renter Beware

Add this corollary to the timeless advice *caveat emptor* ("let the buyer beware"): *caveat rentor*. When we asked RSD readers if they have been satisfied with rental equipment, 58.5 percent of you said no; only 41.5 percent said yes.

Complaints ran the gamut from merely annoying (leaking dry suits) to potentially dangerous (regulators disintegrating at depth, BCs that wouldn't stop inflating). While nothing beats the comfort, familiarity and fit of personal gear, how do you make sure you'll be satisfied if you still have to rent?

If you know a shop with good rental gear, reward them with your business and return the favor by treating the gear as if it were your own. If you're stuck with questionable equipment, check it out thoroughly before the dive and demand a replacement for any piece of equipment you aren't satisfied will work properly.

Here is a sampling of your comments:

"A resounding no on being satisfied with rental gear. Who wants to risk equipment failure at depth? Who wants to use a regulator mouthpiece that's been in hundreds of other mouths? Gag!" —dwombler@cdicorp.com

"Rent the car, rent the villa, drink only the beer, and take your own gear." —CDP Sales@aol.com

"Rental gear? Are you kidding? My last experience had a constant stream of bubbles coming out of the first stage and the mouthpiece had been chewed by something with claws. It convinced me to go out and buy my own stuff." —AIR998@aol.com

"From Cancun to Eilat, Israel, on the Red Sea, I've never been disappointed in rental gear. The only equipment I travel with is mask, fins and dive computer." —SGSJC2@aol.com

"The quality of gear all depends on the proficiency of the outfit you are diving with. I don't rent cars from Joe's Midnight Rentals and I wouldn't rent dive gear from Bud's Dive Shack." —BibRacer@aol.com

Dream On

One day it's bound to happen. The sequence of your birthday and gym locker combination will match the Lotto drawing and *voilà!* You've finally got the cash to make a global expedition to sample the world's great dives.

My number one fantasy dive destination is

Dial (800) DIVE-LINE and follow the recorded instructions to leave your message. Or send e-mail to RSD-mgzn@aol.com. You can also participate on America Online (keyword: RSD); or by writing to: Reader Poll, 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405.

But where will you start? In other words, what one dive destination tops your fantasy list? Dream big, because money is no object. Ice diving under the South Pole? Just sign here. The nuclear wrecks in Bikini Atoll? Shall I put that on your platinum card?

It's your fantasy. We'll compile your answers into a list of dream destinations in a future issue of RSD. Until then, good luck and remember: if you're playing the Georgia Lotto, 06-15-25-32-46-67 is already taken.

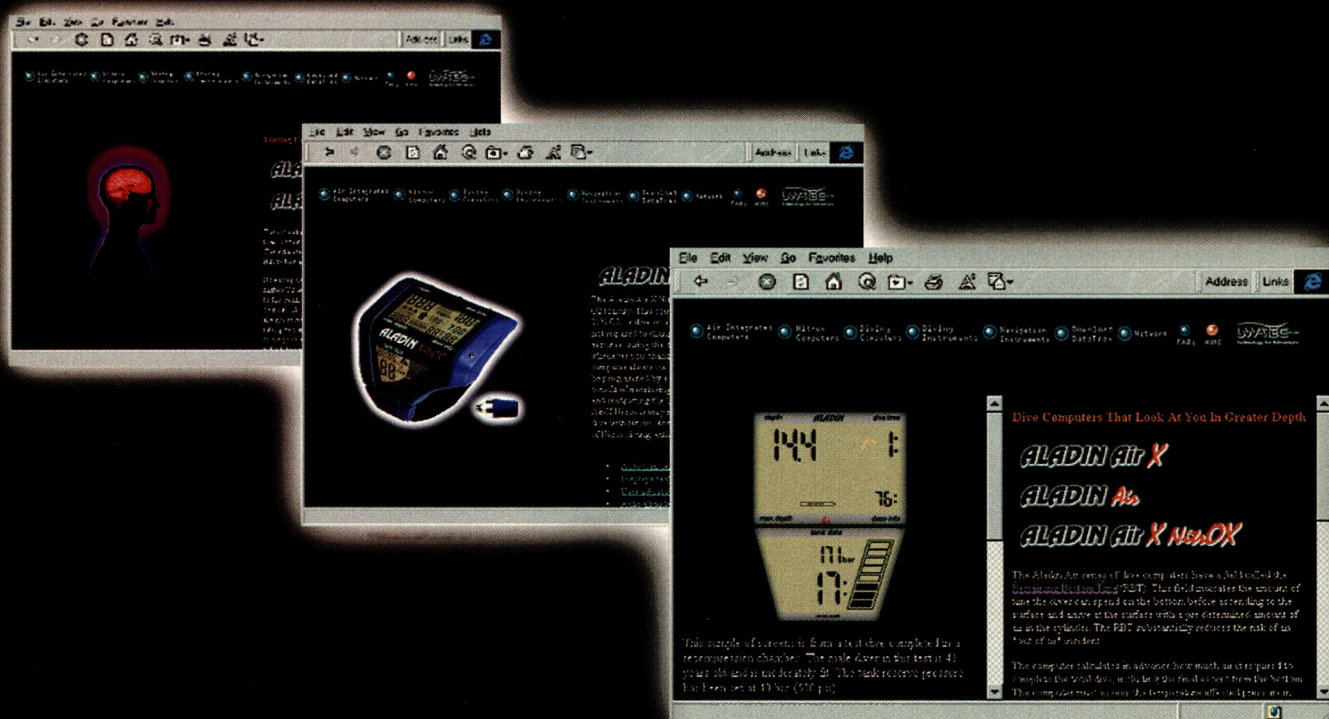
RESULTS

Overall, have you been satisfied with the performance of rental scuba gear?

Yes-41.5%

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CIRCLE NO. 77 ON READER SERVICE CARD

► LESSONS FOR LIFE

Party Time

by Jon Hardy



Ed.'s note: This regular column presents the anatomy of a scuba diving accident and the lessons to be learned from it. The incidents described are real. Names of locations and people have been changed or deleted.

Setting the Stage

As he often did, the U.S. dive store owner set up a long weekend holiday diving trip to Mexico. This trip's group consisted primarily of hard-working, fun-loving, hard-playing young adults. The partying started en route and continued upon arrival at the resort. The first day of diving included some easy but fun shore dives. Because the trip was short and one night would be a night dive, the group (without the trip guide) hit the night spots for dinner, dancing and drinking. It turned into a longer than expected night of partying. The next day, hungover, tired and confused, the group pulled together for a day of more demanding but beautiful boat diving.

The Dive

In spite of the poor fitness of several of the divers, conditions were so ideal that all the divers decided to make the dives. Part way through the first dive, one woman indicated that she was not feeling well and wished to surface. She and her buddy began a slow, controlled ascent. About halfway up, near 30 feet, she went into acute distress and quickly threw up, then bolted for the surface. Her buddy raced after her only to find her on the surface unconscious. As this was a live-boat drift dive, the boat was able to come to their aid immediately.

The Chaos

Everything fell to pieces when the woman was pulled from the water. In the stress of the moment, the crew was unable to function in English and none of the Americans could function adequately in Spanish. No oxygen could be found, no radio was available and no one seemed to know what to do or where to go. Finally, with other tourist divers (not dive leaders) doing CPR, the boat got under way for the beach, leaving part of their dive group behind, still in the water. They were later picked up by another dive boat.

Arriving at the beach, an ambulance still had to be called, delaying treatment further. Then the confusion continued on the way to the chamber, with the victim arriving at a medical facility with no ability to treat diving accidents. The victim was pronounced dead on arrival.

The Analysis

Although legal actions were threatened, they were dropped after the initial investigations revealed the extent of the partying and the dive organizer's non-involvement.

It is dramatically clear that drinking and being hungover do not make for safe diving, but what if, due to some other reason, such as seasickness or flu, you need to throw up under water? What do you do? First, stay put as much as possible and, in particular, do not ascend. Throw up through your regulator so that when you take that inhaling gasp afterward you get air and not water. If you can stay in control, you can even use the purge to help clear the regulator. After you have your breathing under control and are calm, remove your reg, wash it and your mouth out and then slowly proceed to the surface with your buddy ready to help.

Another strong message in this accident is to personally check or have your dive tour operator check that dive boat crews are trained, have oxygen and radios along with an emergency plan. The standard of care has improved greatly in foreign countries often frequented by American divers, but keep in mind that many of these countries have far fewer resources or support for diving than is typically found back home.

Lessons For Life

- Do not party or drink to excess before diving; be well rested.
- Check out your dive operators to be sure they are prepared to handle emergencies.
- Know how to handle yourself if you become sick under water.

A large underwater photograph of a scuba diver swimming near a massive, rounded coral formation. A manta ray is visible on the right, and a butterflyfish is on the left. The image is framed by a repeating border of the text 'TOBAGO TRINIDAD & TOBAGO'.

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Ask RSD

If you've got a question, we've got an answer. ► by **BUCK BUTLER**

Why Fish Fly

Q: I was recently in the Cayman Islands, where I saw flying fish gliding on top of the water in front of my dive boat. I was wondering if you could tell me why they fly? How do they fly? And why do I only see them out of the water and never when I'm diving?

C. WHITWORTH
BELLEVUE, WASH.

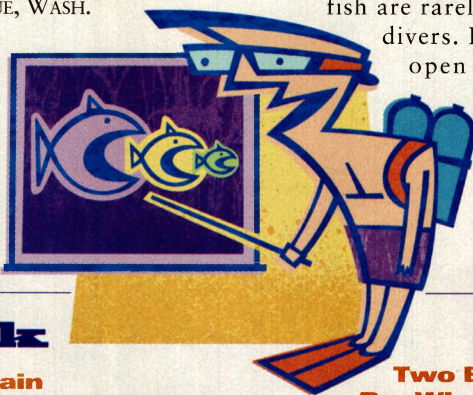
A: Natural adaptations in animals, no matter how bizarre, can usually be explained by the pursuit of one or more of the big three bare necessities—sex, food and shelter. The “flying” that flying fish do is not part of an aerobatic mating ritual, and flying fish are not known to eat low-altitude seagulls, which points to the shelter option.

On land, animals find shelter from predators in small burrows or up tall trees. On the reef, fish may hide in tiny crevices or by using camouflage to disguise themselves among corals and sponges. But flying fish live near the surface of open water, where there's no place to hide. A flying fish has only one escape route when pursued: up. What better way to escape a hungry, bigger fish than to leave the water altogether? Flying fish's predators include dolphins, sailfish, marlin, sharks and a variety of other open-sea hunters.

As you might have guessed, flying fish don't really

“fly” in the same way that birds do. Their propulsion comes from their tails, not from their “wings,” which are actually modified pectoral fins. Beating the lobe of its tail back and forth to gain speed, a flying fish leaves the water to glide as far as 150 yards or more. Some species have been clocked traveling as fast as 35 miles per hour.

Because they live in open water and not on reefs, flying fish are rarely spotted under water by divers. But if you keep your eyes open next time you're on the water, you're likely to see them gliding across the surface, frightened into flight by one of the fish's unnatural predators: the fast-moving dive boat.



Tip Talk

Just Seein' in the Rain

Try using Rain-X on the outside of your mask. It'll shed water upon surfacing, letting you see much more clearly. One application will last for many dives, depending on how often you clean the outside of the lens.

—BARRY LIPMAN, BROOKFIELD, CONN.

This Is Not a Toy

Magnetic dive slates aren't cheap, so I bought Tyco's “Magic Doodle” at Toys R Us for \$11. I did 18 dives with it recently, and it worked great. I even drilled a hole in the corner and put a lanyard through it. It paid for itself on that one trip.

—JOHN PEARSON, VIA E-MAIL

Rattle Tale

I wasn't about to pay \$25 for a store-bought underwater noisemaker, so I decided to make my own. Put two 2-inch pieces of steel rod into a 5- or 6-inch section of three-quarter-inch-diameter PVC pipe, threaded on both ends. Cap the ends and shake well. I made mine for under \$5.

—GUY STEPANSKI, SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ.

A Good Belt

Every time I used to dive, my weight belt would shift and the buckle would end up in the middle of my back, no matter how hard I tightened it. I glued and sewed Velcro to the back of my wetsuit and inside my pocket weight belt and voilà! The belt stays in place and ditches easily in case of an emergency.

—RALPH OPPERMAN, SAULT STE. MARIE, MICH.

Two Bottles of Dry Wine

Here's how to find the hole in a leaky dry suit: Stick a wine bottle in each sleeve, neck toward the hand opening. Flatten the neck, roll it down, and secure it with a large binder clip. Inflate the suit, and brush suspect areas with a soap and water solution. Where there are bubbles, there's trouble.

—STUART ATTWOOD, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

Joe Namath Was Here

Wearing pantyhose makes putting on a wetsuit and booties a lot easier. It may be the '90s, but men still have a problem wearing them in public. Far less conspicuous are peds, little nylon socks that shoe stores give out for people to wear if they're barefoot. They work like pantyhose, without the embarrassment.

—MAUREEN C. CORAL, HIGHLAND MILLS, N.Y.

Reflect On This

Stuck to the bottom edge of a tank, joggers' reflectors—sold in most sporting goods stores—or black and yellow reflective safety tape helps me find my buddy on night dives and in low vis. Scan the darkness with your light a full 360 degrees and go for the glow.

—TERRY GOODWIN, URBANA, OHIO

Send your great ideas to RSD Tip Talk, 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405, or e-mail them to RSDmgzn@aol.com.

Jump In, the Water's Fine

Q: I've been told that hot tubs are not good for you after diving. Yet many dive boats, especially in California, have them. What's the deal?

ROBIN LUCZAK
SAN DIEGO, CALIF.

A: To some Californians, a day of diving without a post-dive dip in the hot tub is like an artichoke pizza without goat cheese. Should this be cause for concern? Probably not.

Conservative physicians and decompression theorists have good reasons for warning divers away from participating in some activities soon after diving—things such as strenuous exercise, alcohol consumption and jumping into a hot tub. If you're already pushing the edge of decompression sickness, they say, anything that can quickly and radically alter your physiology could potentially put you over the top. But there seems to be no evidence to show that hot tubs have contributed to any actual cases of DCS.

Joel Dovenbarger, director of medical services for Divers Alert Network, says a hot tub is more likely to produce a rash than DCS. "I don't know of anyone who's developed symptoms [of DCS] as a

result of being in a hot tub," he says. Dovenbarger cautions that the evidence is mostly anecdotal. "But can we say it's a significant risk factor? Probably not."

If there were divers developing DCS after a hot soak, many of them would end up at the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber, which serves Southern California, the area most frequented by hot-tub dive boats. But Lorraine Sadler, the hyperbaric technician at the chamber, says that of more than 700 treatments on file, none have involved a hot tub.

Temperature can be a significant contributor to DCS, but extreme cold is more dangerous than hot-tub heat. In order for your core temperature to rise to a dangerous level, your outside temperature would be so high that you'd be very uncomfortable in the hot tub. As long as you can get out of the tub under your power, you're probably OK.

Snorkel Spots

Q: I have been searching for the perfect place to snorkel off-shore without taking a boat. During the past few years I have snorkeled in the Caribbean, but I still haven't found the perfect spot. What are the best places in Caribbean where I could walk across the beach, dive into the water

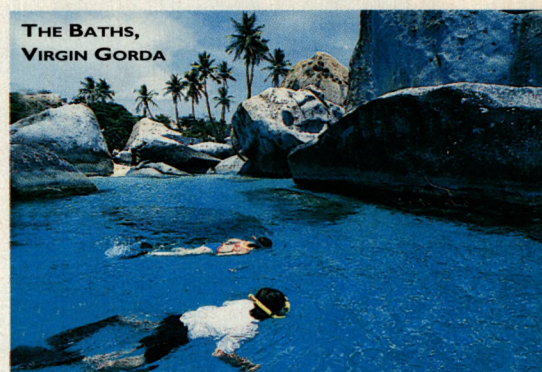
and begin snorkeling?

CHRIS CHANEY
NEWARK, DEL.

A: Ask 10 snorkelers that question and you're likely to get 10 different answers. Here are five dependable spots in the Caribbean:

- *North Shore, Providenciales, Turks & Caicos.* Best known for deep-water diving, Provo also offers clear, colorful and fish-filled patch reefs inside the barrier reef bordering its north shore.

- *The Baths, Virgin Gorda, British Virgin Islands.* Light, rock and water combine here in ways that blur the distinction between art and nature. In case you're wondering, it's all natural.



STEVE SMONSEN

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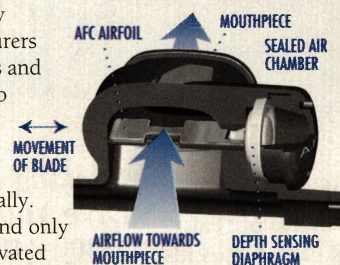
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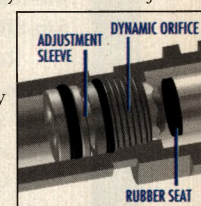


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nurse sharks and hungry Bermuda chub.

• *St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands.* The marked snorkel trail at Trunk Bay is just one of a number of great snorkel spots on one of the most unspoiled islands in the Caribbean.

Hot Fills

Q: Not long ago I had my tank filled at my local dive shop to

3,000 psi as usual. It was filled quite fast, which was nice but it was hot to the touch—*very* hot. Does the heating of the metal cause stress that could be a problem over time? I understand that air fills with the tank in a water trough may be better. Yes or no?

THOMAS J. SMITH
LAKE HAVASU CITY, ARIZ.

A: Every time a scuba tank is filled, no matter the temperature, the metal is stressed. When air is compressed and pumped into the tank, the metal stretches slightly and then contracts back to its original size. Of course this stretching is impossible to see with the naked eye. The more times a tank is filled, the more stress on the tank. Lucky for us, modern scuba tanks are made to withstand this stress many thousands of times over.

In every cylinder manufacturing plant in the United States, there's a person paid—by the government, not the manufacturer—to test a random sampling of tanks to ensure that they're safe and functioning properly. These inspectors pull sample tanks, take them aside and put them on a machine that cycles the tanks through several thousands of fills. Then the inspector overpressures the tank and tries to blow it up. Compared to the abuse an inspector heaps on sample tanks, your occasional hot fills are child's play.

Then there's the hydro test your tank must undergo at least once every five years. During hydro testing, a tank is overpressurized to five-thirds its rated pressure. The tank is submerged in water, and when it's overfilled, it expands, displacing water. The tank must return to within 10 percent of its original size in order to pass the test. Again, there are few things you could do to put as much stress on your tank as those people who are paid to make sure your tank is safe to use. Regardless of how a tank gets wear and tear—whether you cycle it thousands of times or you heat it up when filling—it's nowhere near what it takes to make it fail.

In dive stores and at resorts, most tanks are filled in water, but this is more for the purpose of getting a good fill than for safety. When a tank is filled dry, it does heat up. When a filled tank cools down, the air inside contracts, and a tank with 3,000 psi can drop several hundred psi in the process.

RSD Senior Editor Buck Butler knows a flying fish from a swimming bird.

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Four D-Cell Lights

The popular four-D-cell dive light packs lots of illumination in a small package. We test four and preview a fifth. ► by **JOHN FRANCIS**

IKELITE•RCD LIGHT

HIT► PR-type bulb, easy-open case, convenient safety. **MISS**► Short burn time. **DIMENSIONS**► 4" D x 6" L x 8" H. **BULB**► Halogen, 7.5 watts. **BURN TIME**► 5-6 hours. **PRICE**► \$70 with batteries. **CONTACT**► Ikelite, (317) 923-4523. **WEB SITE**► www.ikelite.com. **E-MAIL**► ikelite@ikelite.com

Max. intensity: ★★★★★
Rating: ★★★★★



The Ikelite RCD has the brightest center spot of the four lights, putting 25 percent more light on the bull's-eye than the next-best UK400. Away from that point its brightness falls off more

EDITOR'S PICK

The IKELITE RCD for its brightest bright spot, fairly even illumination and user-friendly case latch.

abruptly, so that outside a circle roughly one foot in diameter at five feet from the light its intensity is virtually the same. The bright spot is oval in shape and slightly mottled. One of the nicest features of the RCD is its "flip-lock" case closure. Other lights with a screw-on light head can be difficult to unscrew after they've been seated because the large O-ring resists turning. The RCD's light head is drawn straight into the case by a toggle and a lever; a spring unseats it when the lever is released and a safety prevents the lever from being lifted accidentally. The on/off switch has a safety too; this one is easy to operate with thick gloves. The light head is protected by a rubber shroud. As a bonus for travelers, the halogen bulb has a standard PR-style base, so if it burns out somewhere in the Third World you can replace it, if need be, with a common incandescent flashlight bulb and still have a working light, though a comparatively dim one.

*Maximum intensity indicates the brightness of the center of the illuminated area.

UNDERWATER KINETICS•UK 400

HIT► Smooth, even pattern, small size. **MISS**► "Hot spot" not as hot. **DIMENSIONS**► 3.9" D x 5.6" L x 7.5" H. **BULB**► Xenon, 5.8 watts. **BURN TIME**► 7-10 hours. **PRICE**► \$60 without batteries. **CONTACT**► Underwater Kinetics, (619) 744-7560.

Max. intensity: ★★★★★
Rating: ★★★★★

Physically smallest of the four, the UK400 sacrifices some maximum intensity to gain a smooth, even bright spot with gradually feathered edges, making it the best floodlight of the four. That smoothness is achieved



RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★ = excellent
★★★★ = very good
★★★ = good
★★ = fair

by using a more aggressively dimpled reflector than on the RCD light, which slightly diffuses and "averages" the light. As a result, what you see on the reef is actually there, not painted on it by irregular illumination. The on/off switch has an exceptionally handy safety. The light head is a conventional screw on/off type.

On the Horizon

The arms race among light manufacturers continues, as Princeton Tec plans to introduce later this year a new four-cell light to be called the "Tropic Pro." The pre-production sample we tested gave a smooth, even beam pattern almost identical to that of the UK 400, though with slightly less maximum intensity. Look for a price of about \$60 including one set of batteries.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE ESSIG



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CIRCLE NO. 32 ON READER SERVICE CARD

PELICAN•BRITELITE MODIFIED SPOT

HIT► Dual-filament bulb. **MISS**► Bulky; irregular beam pattern. **DIMENSIONS**► 4.5" D x 6.5" L x 8" H. **BULB**► Xenon, dual-filament, 7 watts. **BURN TIME**► 8-10 hours. **PRICE**► \$67.50 without batteries. **CONTACT**► Pelican Products, (800) 473-5422 or (310) 326-4700. **WEB SITE**► www.pelican.com.

Max. intensity: ★★★

Rating: ★★★

One of the best features of the Pelican light is its dual-filament bulb. All these lights overdrive their bulbs in search of an intense beam, but the price is a short bulb life—typically the bulb burns out on your second or third set of batteries. If you're at 90 feet at that moment and your light is a Pelican, just turn the on/off switch the other way to engage the backup filament and you have light again. The price of this redundancy is an oddly shaped beam, because the unused filament casts a shadow.

ow. This can be confusing: is that dark spot a hole in the reef or the shadow of the filament? The bright spot is about the same size as that of the other lights, and considerably less bright than either the RCD or UK400. A more concentrated "Laser Spot" reflector is available, as is a three-way handle version called the "Laser Pro 4D." The BriteLite is the bulkiest light of the four, and in fact requires ballast of about one pound (supplied) to make it neutral. The on/off switch has a safety which is difficult to operate one-handed or with thick gloves.



DACOR•UL 1000

HIT► Smooth, even pattern; convertible handle. **MISS**► Less intensity. **DIMENSIONS**► 4" D x 6" L x 10" H. **BULB**► Xenon, 6 watts. **BURN TIME**► 7-10 hours. **PRICE**► \$55 without batteries. **CONTACT**► Dacor Corp., (847) 446-9555.

Max. intensity: ★★★

Rating: ★★★

Like the Ikelite, the Dacor UL 1000 uses a bulb with a standard PR-style base, so it's easy to find some kind of replacement almost anywhere in the world. The beam's bright spot is round and fairly even. Its maximum intensity is slightly less than the BriteLite and somewhat yellow in color. This indicates that some of the bulb's output is lost in the invisible infrared spectrum. Bulbs shifted toward the infrared normally last much longer than the bright white ones, however. The UL 1000 is somewhat positively buoyant and floats beam-upward, making it possible to retrieve if you drop it. The handle can be converted quickly from pistol-style to lantern-style without tools. In the pistol position, however, the handle projects an uncomfortable 90 degrees from the body. The on/off switch has a safety—a red button on the end of the switch. It's easy to operate one-handed and with gloves on.

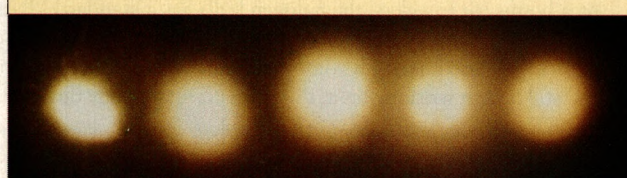
verted quickly from pistol-style to lantern-style without tools. In the pistol position, however, the handle projects an uncomfortable 90 degrees from the body. The on/off switch has a safety—a red button on the end of the switch. It's easy to operate one-handed and with gloves on.



BEAM PATTERNS: Flood or Spot?

Just as important as the amount of illumination you get from a dive light is how the illumination is distributed. Area illumination requires a floodlight with a wide, even pattern. Identifying what's at the back of that cave requires a tightly focused spot. In either case, the light should fall evenly on the target; dark areas create false shadows.

The actual beam patterns of five lights (including the prototype Princeton Tec) are shown below in order of maximum brightness. From left to right, Ikelite RCD, Underwater Kinetics UK400, Princeton Tec Tropic Pro, Pelican BriteLite and Dacor UL 1000.



Live Longer

For quality bulbs like those used in dive lights, manufacturers add gases and additional pressurization to enable the bulb to burn brighter, whiter and longer. As a result, to get the most out of these more expensive bulbs, you should:

- Avoid turning the light on and off unnecessarily, because when you turn it on there's a high-voltage spike that's hard on the filament. Of course, you have to balance fewer on/off cycles with more burning time.
- Don't burn the light unnecessarily.
- Don't play with the on/off switch.
- If you're using your dive light between dive trips as a household utility light, replace the expensive high-output, short-life bulb with something cheaper.

What's This "PR" Thing?

A PR-type bulb is one with a base design developed many years ago by General Electric. The base looks like a smooth-sided can with a flange at the top and a knob on the bottom.

The PR is by far the most common type of small bulb, and samples (with various voltage, wattage and quality) can be found in hardware stores anywhere in the world.

Cool Stuff

SPAREPAC HOLSTER FOR SPARE AIR

HIT► Simple pull releases Spare Air. **MISS►** Buckles allow holster to move. **MATERIALS►** Nylon webbing and cloth, Fastex quick-release buckles. **PRICE►** \$23. **CONTACT►** St. Claire Diving Products, (800) 235-3483 or (707) 763-3483.

Rating: ★★★★★

If the front of your BC looks like an overdecorated Christmas tree, you'll like the Sparepac. It allows you to tuck your Spare Air back alongside your tank where it's out of the way. Nevertheless, with the mouthpiece hanging down it's easy to reach. The web-



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CIRCLE NO. 82 ON READER SERVICE CARD

EDITOR'S PICK

"SPAREPAC" holster. It keeps Spare Air out of the way yet easy to grab.

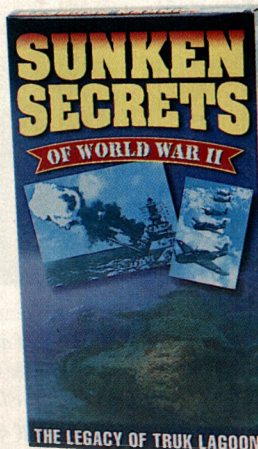
being can be looped under the tank mounting straps, but I'd cut it and sew the ends to my BC. The throat of the nylon sleeve has an adjustable drawstring so you can pull it as tight as necessary to keep the cylinder from being snagged and pulled out accidentally. But the drawstring is elastic, so a firm pull will still release it. There are no snaps, clips or even Velcro to unfasten: one yank and Spare Air is in your hand. A very minor complaint: because there are quick-release buckles in the mounting system, the unit can flop around a bit and the Spare Air's mouthpiece could snag something. I'd prefer a more rigid mounting to my BC. The Sparepac also can be used with pony bottles.

VIDEO: "THE LEGACY OF TRUK LAGOON"

HIT► Interviews with survivors. MISS► Not enough underwater video. LENGTH► 50 minutes. PRICE► \$19.95, plus \$4.50 shipping and handling. CONTACT► Superior Home Video, (847) 381-0909.

Rating: ★★★★★

On Feb. 17, 1944, "Operation Hailstone" created the world's premier wreck dive site in Truk Lagoon. This video uses archival film and interviews with surviving Trukese, Japanese and American participants to tell the story, then covers an expedition to find and dive an undiscovered shipwreck, the *Katsuragisan Maru*. History buffs, armchair divers and those planning a trip to Truk will gain valuable background to the dive we'd all like to make. Underwater scenes, though impressive in quality, make up less than half the video.



LAZER-STIK MARKER LIGHT

HIT► Small, bright, reusable. MISS► Bat-

teries are expensive and slightly harder to find than AAs. BULB► LED POWER► Two A-76 "coin" cell batteries. PRICE► \$14.95. CONTACT► Innovative Scuba Concepts, (719) 597-2885. E-MAIL► isc@usa.net.

Rating: ★★★★★

Rapidly advancing LED technology has made possible an electric marker light that is about the same size and shape as a chemical light stick yet is as bright as the larger AA-powered markers. This one is six inches long, almost all of it illuminated. Available in red or amber, constant or flashing. The constantly burning version runs for about 12 hours on a set of batteries. These are A-76-type camera batteries available in many U.S. supermarkets and discount stores (about \$2 each), but take spares when you travel to Micronesia.



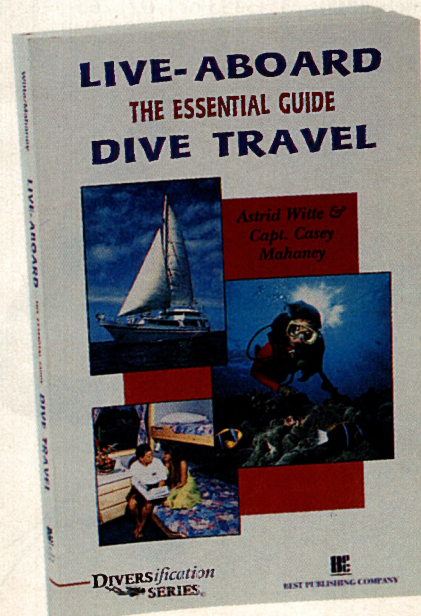
LIVE-ABOARD DIVE TRAVEL: THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

by Astrid Witte and Capt. Casey Mahaney, 1996, 162 pgs.

HIT► Good general introduction. MISS► Few specifics on boats and destinations. PRICE► \$14.95. CONTACT► Best Publishing Co., (520) 527-1055. WEB SITE► www.diveweb.com/best. E-MAIL► dive-books@bestpub.com.

Rating: ★★

What clothes should I pack? What extra equipment should I take? Can I get spe-



cial meals? What if my family needs to contact me? How much should I tip? The first-time client of a live-aboard dive boat will find answers to these questions and more in the first, and by far most valuable, half of *Live-Aboard Dive Travel*. The authors also devote a long chapter to a primer on underwater photography, contending that a live-aboard with on-board film processing is the best way for the amateur photographer to get better fast. They have obviously had many years of experience on live-aboards and their advice is practical and sensible. The last half of the book gives thumbnail descriptions of 15 dive destinations and contact information for live-aboard fleets, dive travel specialists and airlines. This information is sketchy and sometimes dated.

KEVLAR TROPICAL-WEIGHT GLOVE

HIT► Good resistance to penetration. **MISS►** Restricted hand movement. **MATERIAL►** Woven Kevlar, nylon lining, Velcro closure. **SIZES►** XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL. **PRICE►** \$32. **CONTACT►** Akona Adventure Gear, (561) 733-4005. **E-MAIL►** arrowfrog@aol.com.

Rating: ★★★★★

Dive gloves are controversial in the tropics because they allow you to be careless about touching fragile marine life. But having experienced the stubborn infections that seem invariably to follow coral cuts, I'm going to wear gloves, thank you, and be careful. These from Akona are woven from Kevlar—the bulletproof vest material—with a nylon lining for comfort.

I tried slicing them with a razor blade and puncturing them with a needle. They resisted both about



twice as well as the coated fabric or synthetic leather of other gloves. The back of the glove is Kevlar too, which is a plus when you backhand a sea urchin. Kevlar does not stretch, however, making it hard to grip small flashlights and pole spears; buy an extra-large size.

EVAC

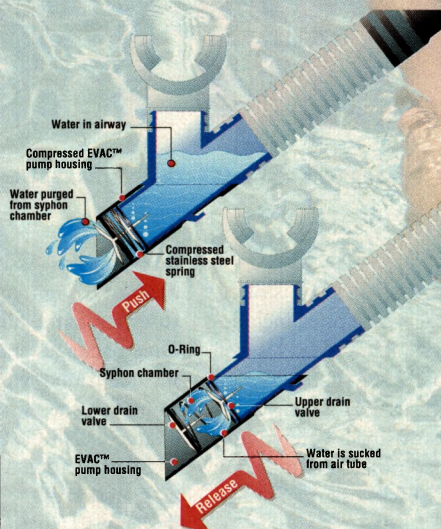
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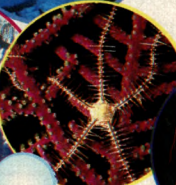
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dive deals



Dive the World

The hottest deals on Planet Scuba. ► Edited by **NICK LUCEY**

Ambergris Caye, Belize

► Now through Dec. 15, CAPTAIN MORGAN'S RETREAT is offering a special \$1,299-per-person dive package. The price includes round-trip airfare from Miami, Houston or New Orleans, seven nights accommodations in one of the hotel's 21 thatched-roof casitas, 10 dives on the barrier reef, breakfast and dinner daily, and inter-island transfers. The hotel boasts a freshwater swimming pool and sand-floor bar about three miles north of San Pedro. Call (800) 447-2931, fax (218) 847-0334 or e-mail information@captainmorgans.com.

Andros, Bahamas

► Now you can dive Andros's barrier reef—one of the world's longest—and catch a glimpse of the island's unique mangrove ecosystem and the barrier reef's *raison d'être*. SMALL HOPE BAY LODGE's new "Safari on Fresh Creek" excursions are offered once or twice per week (depending on demand) and explore the island's bonefish flats, Fresh Creek tidal river, wreck of the New York ferry *Monadnock* and, with luck, its population of wild dolphins. The hotel specializes in diving, snorkeling and fly-fishing vacations. Call (800) 223-6961 or (242) 368-2013; e-mail SHBinfo@SmallHope.com or visit the web site at www.SmallHope.com.

Bermuda

► If you're a wreck addict, you might want to check yourself into BERMUDA WRECK WEEK 1997, sponsored by Bermuda Tourism, local dive operators and Rodale's *Scuba Diving* magazine. A special package is being offered for the gala event that takes place Oct. 9 through 16. The package, priced from \$1,042 for five days and from \$1,173 for seven, includes round-trip airfare, accommodations (including gratuities and taxes), airport transfers, receptions, guided historical tours, four two-tank dives, one night dive and certificates. You can book it through the PADI TRAVEL NETWORK by calling (800) 729-7234, ext. 2, or visit www.padi.com.

Bonaire

► You don't have to be a coral-hugger to enjoy the International Year of the Reef's BONAIRE DIVE FESTIVAL Nov. 1 through 8. The largest environmental diving event in the Caribbean—sponsored by Tourism Corporation Bonaire, the Bonaire Hotel

and Tourism Association, The Coral Reef Alliance and Rodale's *Scuba Diving* magazine—is headed by Dr. Sylvia Earle and features seminars, film presentations, field studies and lots of diving. Dive packages start at \$859 per person, double occupancy, and include round-trip airfare from Miami, seven nights accommodations, six one-tank boat dives, airport transfers, taxes and service charges. Call CARADONNA CARIBBEAN ADVENTURES at (800) 328-2288 or MADURO DIVE FANTA-SEAS at (800) 327-6709.

Cozumel

► DIVE PARADISE is offering two dive packages to promote its new dive concession at the VILLABLANCA GARDEN BEACH HOTEL in Cozumel. One is a seven-night package, which includes five two-tank morning and four one-tank afternoon dives, welcome tank and all taxes for \$420 per person, double occupancy, while the other includes four nights, three two-tank morning and two one-tank afternoon dives, welcome tank and taxes for \$249 per person, double occupancy. Both are valid through Dec. 19. Call LANDFALL DIVE & ADVENTURE TRAVEL at (800) 525-3833 or (510) 794-1599, or e-mail lnfall@aol.com.

Fiji

► The *Fiji Aggressor*, launched June 6 from Whidbey Island, Wash., is the world's first handicapped-accessible live-aboard dive yacht, complete with hydraulic wheelchair lifts and shower stalls with seats. The vessel houses up to 16 divers in eight staterooms with en suite baths, freshwater showers, climate control and storage room. The *Aggressor* will be based at the Trade Winds Hotel in Suva, and week-long charters cost \$2,095 per person. For information or reservations, call the AGGRESSOR FLEET at (800) 348-2628 or (504) 385-2628, e-mail divboat@aol.com or visit Aggressor Fleet's web site at www.aggressor.com.

Galapagos

► Ever aspire to be part of a *National Geographic* assignment? Ever want to meet Peter Benchley, author of *Jaws* and *The Deep*, and David Doubilet, world-acclaimed photographer? You can do both if you book a cruise aboard the *Galapagos Aggressor I* and *II* in late December 1997 and January 1998. Charters will feature environmental discussions with Benchley

EDITOR'S CHOICE Micronesia

Continental Micronesia is celebrating its newly launched CONTINENTAL'S WORLD OF DIVING booking office with reduced dive packages to Palau, Truk, Yap and Pohnpei. Packages start at \$999 and include airfare, accommodations, transfers and taxes. Diving is not included in that price.

Try booking a trip yourself and you could easily pay that for the airfare alone. Add-ons to other islands served by Continental Micronesia are also available. Call (800) GO-DIVING, e-mail them at mail@destmic.com or visit their web site at www.destmic.com.

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and the photography of Doubilet. Call the AGGRESSOR FLEET at (800) 348-2628 or (504) 385-2628, e-mail divboat@aol.com or visit the web site at www.aggressor.com.

Grand Cayman

► According to the CAYMAN DIVING LODGE, its fall packages are approximately 25 percent less than seasonal rates. A seven-night package, including air-conditioned accommodations, three meals daily, diving, all taxes and transfers, costs \$884 per person, double occupancy. Call (800) TLC-DIVE or visit the resort's web site at www.caymandivelodge.com.

Guam

► The southern half of Guam, largest of Micronesia's multitudinous islands, is a hotbed of native Chamorro culture. Here you'll find the INN ON THE BAY, which, along with PROFESSIONAL SPORTS DIVERS, is offering a package for \$750 per person, double occupancy, that includes six nights in beachfront accommodations and 10 dives. For information, contact the hotel at (011) 671-565-8522; e-mail iotb@ite.net or the dive operation at (011) 671-565-3488; e-mail psdivers@kuentos.guam.net.

Red Sea

► Cruises aboard PETER HUGHES' new *Moon Dancer* are specially priced at \$2,395 for an eight-night package, \$2,995 for 10 nights. Prices include breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks, beverages, up to five dives daily, transfers, land tour and last night's land accommodations. Call (800) 9-DANCER or (305) 669-9391, e-mail dancer@peterhughes.com or visit the web site at www.peterhughes.com.

Solomon Islands

► DIVE DISCOVERY is offering a 14-day mega-package that explores Solomon Islands diving from a land-based operation

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Visit RSD's web site at www.scubadiving.com. Travel specialists, send your hotel/dive packages to RSD's Dive the World, 6600 Abercorn St., Suite 208, Savannah, GA 31405, or e-mail them to RSDNick@aol.com.

and live-aboard perspective. The price is \$3,470 per person, double occupancy, and includes round-trip airfare from Los Angeles, seven nights aboard the *Spirit of Solomons*, four nights at the Divers Lodge in Gizo, three days of diving with Adventure Sports Gizo, and all meals. Don't forget to stop your mail. Call DIVE DISCOVERY TRAVEL at (415) 256-8890 or e-mail

divediscovery@compuserve.com.

Sulawesi, Indonesia

► REEF AND RAINFOREST WORLDWIDE ADVENTURE TRAVEL and SINGAPORE AIRLINES are offering a still and video photography certification class free of charge when you book their "Sulawesi Dive Special" for the month of October only (package without class available through Dec. 10). The package costs \$2,995 per person, double occupancy, and includes round-trip airfare from Los Angeles, all transfers, seven nights accommodations at Hotel Paradise and Resort, six days unlimited shore and boat diving, lunch and dinner daily and two nights at the Pan Pacific in Singapore. Call (800) 794-9767 or (415) 289-1760, e-mail rntravel@aol.com or visit the web site at www.reefrainfrst.com.

Veracruz, Mexico

► The FIESTA AMERICANA VERACRUZ is offering a four-day, three-night "FiestaBreak" dive package now through Dec. 31. The price starts at \$422 per person, double occupancy, and includes accommodations, two-tank boat dives per day, transfers and buffet breakfast. Children under 12 stay and eat free. For air-inclusive packages, call (800) 9-BREAK-9; land-only, (800) FIESTA-1.

5



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HAWAII

Pu'uhonua O' Honaunau

No matter how you say it, this Kona Coast shore dive is a sanctuary for marine life and lazy shore divers.

► BY MELISSA AND BRANDON COLE

NORBERT WU

When the long arm of Murphy's Law reached across the Pacific Ocean to the Big Island, Hawaii, and knocked our dive boat out of commission for the day, we reluctantly followed a local friend's advice: Try a shore dive. We headed for—say it with us—Pu'uhonua O' Honaunau (*Poo-oo-ho-nu-ah oh Ho-now-now*).

Turns out the hardest thing about this Kona Coast shore dive is saying the name. The easy way out is to simply call it "Place of Refuge," for in ancient times, this protected bay was a sanctuary where tribal kings lived, died and were interred in a great temple. Wrongdoers and defeated warriors also made their way here to seek the protection and absolution of the local *kahuna*. Today, the reconstructed dwellings, temple and statues are the centerpiece of a national historic park and the bay's reef is a can't-miss shore dive packed with diverse Pacific marine life.

Across the crescent-shaped bay from the temple, waves have carved a natural staircase into the smooth rolls of *pa'hoehoe* lava, providing an easy, wade-in entry. There were several green sea turtles gorging themselves on the algae growing on these shallow rock reefs and as we slipped beneath the surface, brilliant yellow tangs and long-nosed butterflyfish flocked to greet us.

The shallows along the bay are a bustling zone of cleaner stations. Rainbow-hued parrotfish, half a dozen butterflyfish species, and orange-tailed surgeons line up as if at a car wash while day-glow yellow and purple Hawaiian cleaner wrasses pick off tasty ectoparasites.

For a deeper dive, head straight out toward the middle of the bay, over a sand channel



MAP BY IRIS MEKKER

(and the cinder blocks arranged to spell "Aloha") to the sloping reef that starts in 35 feet of water. At the base of coral pillars, you'll find long-spined urchin housing commensal shrimp, yellow dwarf moray eels, dour leaf scorpionfish, and tiny boxer (aka pompom) crabs boldly brandishing anemones on outstretched claws. Poke about the rubble and you'll chance on

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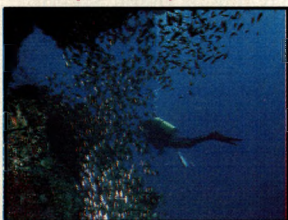
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DIVE USA

dragon wrasses. With long fins and splotched coloration, these juvenile rock-mover wrasses look like, even swim like, a sprig of unappetizing drift algae instead of a tasty tidbit for hungry fish. You're even likely to find the king of camouflage—the octopus—perched atop a coral mound.

We kicked past one of the curious cephalopods, following a school of goat-fish over a field of blue finger coral, down the slope that ends in sand at about 90 feet. As we worked our way toward open ocean, we passed one giant shelving coral hosting no fewer than five green turtles. Nestled into coral crevices, they seemed to nap the day away in their own place of refuge, even as tangs and damsels nibbled on the algal garden growing on their shells.

After nearly 90 minutes of bottom time we had to call it quits. Floating to the surface, we began a lazy swim toward the lava steps. "Ready to grab another tank?" Brandon asked, smiling, pointing out to the center of the bay where the dorsal fins of a pod of spinner dolphins glistened in the sun.

Thank you, Mr. Murphy. What's on the schedule for tomorrow?

Dive In

Location



Pu'uuhonua O' Honaunau National Historic Park is located just south of Kealahakua Bay on the Big Island of Hawaii, about 20 miles south of Kailua-Kona. Drive south from Kona on Route 11 to mile marker 104. Turn right and down to the ocean on Route 160. Immediately before the main entrance to the park take the dirt road to the right for the closest parking to the lava steps.



Water Temperature

78F in winter to 81F in summer.



Profile

The reef—and divers—enjoy year-round protection from the prevailing weather. There is usually little to no current, although there is occasionally a strong swell from the southwest. Visibility ranges from 50 to 200 feet.

Be alert for heavy boat traffic, especially during entries and exits near the boat launch.



Operators

There are numerous full-service stores in Kailua-Kona, including **Hawaiian Divers**, (800) 525-7234 or (808) 329-5662; **Jack's Diving Locker**, (800) 345-4807 or (808) 329-7585; and **Kona Coast Divers**, (800) KOA-DIVE or (808) 329-8802.

Freelancers Melissa and Brandon Cole enjoy diving Hawaii as a break from the chilly waters of their home in Spokane, Wash.

CANADA

Barkley Sound, British Columbia

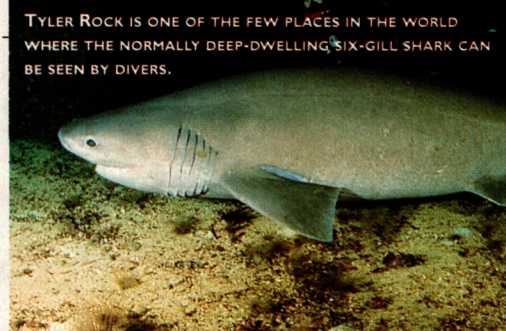
What's the big deal off Vancouver Island?

Volkswagen-sized sharks and towering rock pinnacles.

► **BY NEIL McDANIEL**

Ghostly plumose anemones shroud the peak of Tyler Rock, glowing in the diffuse emerald light. Descending through the narrow canyon that splits the crest of the reef, we drop quickly to a sandy ledge at 70 feet. Suddenly, a massive shark appears, swimming straight toward us. Twelve feet long and as big as a barrel, it moves with effortless grace, closing fast. In seconds it's within touching distance, near enough that I can count the six distinctive gill slits and stare into coal-black eyes as the Volkswagen-sized shark cruises by, leaving us in its powerful wake.

There are only a few places in the world where the primitive six-gill shark can be seen. Tyler Rock, a pinnacle reef in Barkley Sound on the west coast of Van-



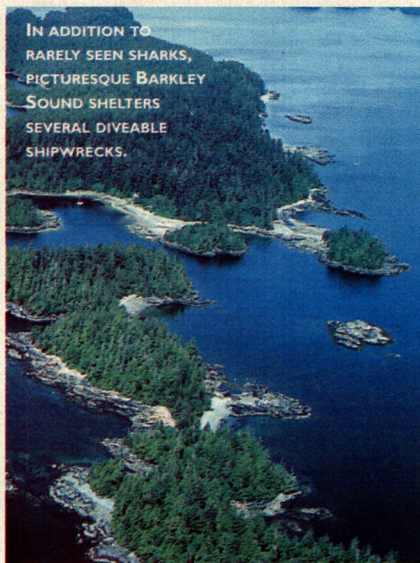
TYLER ROCK IS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES IN THE WORLD WHERE THE NORMALLY DEEP-DWELLING SIX-GILL SHARK CAN BE SEEN BY DIVERS.

couver Island, is one of them. Six-gill sharks usually roam the ocean floor many hundreds of feet deep, feeding on skates, smaller sharks and various crustaceans. Why they patrol the relatively shallow reefs here is a mystery, and just one of the many surprises found on the pinnacles of Barkley Sound.

Hornby Rock is another. Located at the open perimeter of the sound, rolling

NEIL McDANIEL

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NEIL MCDANIEL

Pacific swells break over this pinnacle, making it easy to find but difficult to dive. In calm conditions, divers descend to a pastel mural of nine-inch-long Californian mussels, their shells painted with the shades of proliferating anemones. Oddly enough, these giant mussels, which are usually most abundant in the intertidal zone, are found as deep as 100 feet on the outer face of this pinnacle.

About halfway along the length of Imperial Eagle Channel, Renate Reef reaches to within about 30 feet of the surface. The peak is heavily overgrown with encrusting invertebrates, the most conspicuous being yellow-green staghorn bryozoans, which gives the bottom an almost tropical look. The reef is riddled with gullies, providing home to China rockfish and several approachable wolf eels.

Shipwrecks in Barkley Sound include the 1891 wreck of the "hot air" ship *Ericsson*, built by the famous Swedish-American inventor John Ericsson; the wooden freighter *Nika* and the large steam freighter *Tuscan Prince*, both lost during a storm in 1923. But the signature wreck of Barkley Sound is the 8,500-ton freighter *Vanlene*. While transporting a load of 300 Dodge Colts from Japan to Vancouver, the ship lost its way off the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. All of the crew and half of the cars were saved, but the ship could not be salvaged. After several years, the hull tumbled off the reef and now lies scattered at depths from 10 to 120 feet, requiring dozens of dives to explore fully.

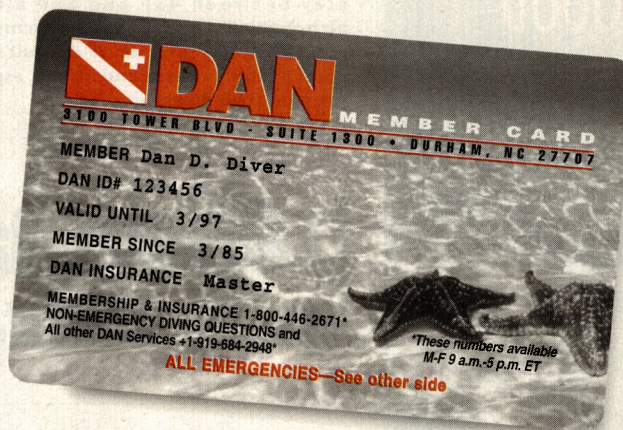
Dive In



Location

Barkley Sound is located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, about a

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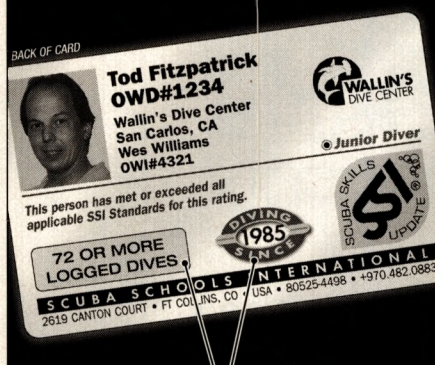
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Water Temperature

Water temperatures below 30 feet stay between 45F and 50F all year, although the surface layer warms up to 65F during the summer. A dry suit is most comfortable in these conditions, especially for repetitive dives.



Profile

Visibility, ranging from 20 to 80 feet, varies seasonally and is generally best in the fall and winter.



Operators

A year-round dive lodge is operated by **Rendezvous Dive Ventures** (250-724-8601). Several live-aboards service Barkley Sound on a seasonal basis. Contact **Exta Sea Charters** (250-755-9144) or **Lady Goodiver Charters** (604-931-6584).

Neil McDaniel is a freelance photojournalist who enjoys counting shark gills.

WEST COAST

La Bufadora, Baja California

**Has your diving been a little gray and drab lately?
Maybe the color lab at La Bufadora can help.**

► **BY JONATHAN DAVIES**

The sky and the sea were a seamless sheet of gray on the day I made my first dive off La Bufadora, the famed blowhole 20 miles south of Ensenada in Baja California.

Like characters in a grainy black and white film, my wife, two other divers, our guide and I bounced for 20 minutes from swell to swell in an open fishing boat to reach the dive site—a series of craggy pinnacles that jutted from the heaving ocean a couple of miles offshore.

The rush of cold water made me blink, and when my eyes opened, I was dazzled by what looked like an underwater Mardi Gras. The face of the pinnacle, which drops hundreds of feet to the seafloor, was plastered with yellow sponges, pink and green anemones, orange tunicates and hydroids of just about every color. It was as if someone had thrown a switch and our dive was instantly colorized.

Most tourists know this region of Mexico's Baja Peninsula for the namesake blowhole. Surging waves slam into the rocks at the tip of the Punta Banda Peninsula and send spray geysering up to 100 feet in the air, often dousing the crowds that gather to watch the spectacle.

But if you've come to La Bufadora to get wet, the real attraction is diving the offshore pinnacles. The secret of the submarine spectacle here is the nutrient-rich California Current, which streams southward, welling up along the Pacific edge of



STEVE ESSIG

the Baja, nourishing a stunning variety of fish and invertebrates that's every bit as good as the Channel Islands. Sinister-looking wolf eels lurk in the pinnacles' crevices and brightly colored nudibranchs graze on kelp that clings to the rocky faces.

Thanks to years on the edge of obscurity in the diving world, game at La Bufadora remains plentiful. Hubcap-sized rock scallops are a particular treat. Hefty sheepshead, lingcod and even the occasional yellowtail still cruise the depths, although pelagic fish are a rarity.

Dive In

Location



Twenty miles south of Ensenada on Hwy. 1, and 85 miles south of Tijuana.



Water Temperature

The California Current that keeps the reefs thriving keeps temperatures in the 50Fs (winter) and low 60Fs (summer) so a quarter-inch wetsuit or dry suit is recommended.



Profile

Visibility is closely tied to the weather and fluctuates from 20 feet up to a sparkling 70-plus feet on the best days. Keep a

close eye on your gauges when diving the pinacles, which drop thousands of feet. Diving is year-round.



Operators

La Bufadora Dive (011-52-615-42092) is a full-service dive shop offering air fills, rentals and boat charters. Dive packages are also available through the remodeled **Baja Beach and Tennis Club** (011-52-617-30220).

RSD contributor *Jonathan Davies* lives in Pasadena, Calif.

FLORIDA KEYS

Looe Key, Fla.

Come party at the hottest nightclub south of Miami. Hint—it ain't Sloppy Joe's.

► **BY BRET FORBES**

The pulsating bolts of light twirled through the darkness, pivoting to the beat of the music. Another night of abandon in the Florida Keys was off to a rollicking start when one light beam locked in on an embarrassed couple shimmying across the rippled sand dance floor.

Spotlight dance! Frozen in fear, the pair of spiny lobsters twitched antennae and looked nervously around for a few awkward moments—only to be saved by the fading music and the DJ's patter: "That last song was 'Aqua Lung' by Jethro Tull, and it's dedicated to all the divers who ventured out to the reef this afternoon for the annual Looe Key Underwater Music Festival."

The festival had ended just hours before and our boat captain decided to give us an unforgettable night dive by cranking up the underwater sound system one last time. Only in the Conch Republic would they combine a day of diving, classic rock 'n' roll and reef conservation messages into the underwater event of the year. The annual festival, held each July, has more music and unlikely sights than Lollapalooza. In previous years, the attractions have included the Snorkeling Elvises gyrating under water in full Vegas regalia, and a diver in a mermaid suit.

Not that Looe Key needs gimmicks to attract divers. The shallow spur-and-groove reef here offers some of the prettiest, fishiest diving in the entire string of islands. Topped by sea fans and groves of elkhorn coral, the coral fingers sink down to sand channels with a maximum depth of about 30 feet, harboring a range

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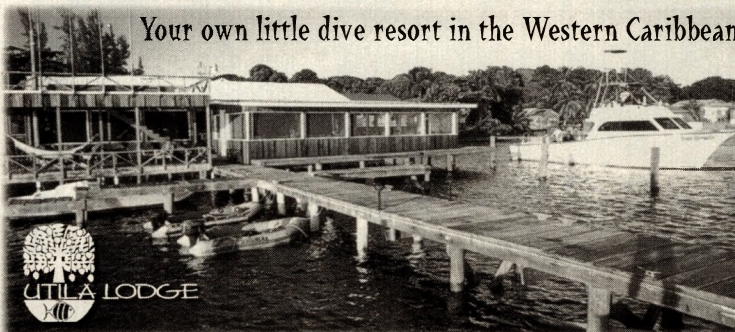


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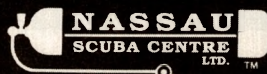
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30 • RODALE'S SCUBA DIVING

of reef fish from colorful angels to six-foot barracuda.

The area is named for the *HMS Looe*, a British ship that ran aground here in 1744, but only small fragments of the wreck remain. Instead, you'll find virtually every species of marine life native to the Florida Keys—grouper, snapper, parrotfish and damselfish, to name just a few—stacked up like groceries in the neat, orderly aisles of coral. If you're really lucky, you might glimpse a spotted eagle ray or a shark gracefully cruising the outskirts of the reef.

It's also a pretty night dive. So as coral polyps extended, feeding to the beat of Jimmy Buffet's "Margaritaville," I marveled at the parrotfish, cocooned in their gauzy blankets, sleeping soundly through the racket.

The next song? The spine-tingling "da-dum ... da-dum" of the *Jaws* theme. I shined my light around in hope of seeing a serendipitous shark. Just then, a big tarpon exploded from the darkness, flashed through the beam of my light and pounced on a school of bait fish. A predator with ambition, inspired to dream big by the musical score.

Dive In



Location

Looe Key reef is located about six miles south of Big Pine Key and 30 miles north of Key West. The reef is accessible only by boat and is serviced by dive shops in Big Pine and Ramrod Keys.



Water Temperature

Low to mid-80Fs in summer; mid-70Fs in winter.



Profile

The visibility at Looe Key normally averages about 30 feet but varies from day to day depending on weather. Reefs start in five feet of water and reach a maximum depth of about 30 feet in the deepest sand channels.

A marine sanctuary since 1981, Looe Key is now a sanctuary preservation area in the new Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The rules: no touching the coral, no spearfishing, no lobstering and no taking conch.

For more information on the sanctuary, contact the FKNMS office at (305) 743-2347. For more information on the Looe Key Underwater Music Festival, contact the Lower Keys Chamber of Commerce on Big Pine Key at (305) 872-2411.



Operators

The dive shops closest to Looe Key are **Innerspace Dive Shop**, (800) 538-2896 or (305) 872-2319; **Underseas Inc.**, (800) 446-5663 or (305) 872-2700; and **Looe Key Reef Resort and Dive Center**, (800) 942-5397 or (305) 872-2215.

Freelance photographer Bret Forbes lives in DeLand, Fla.

The Ultimate Guide to Nitrox

Behind the myths and misconceptions, it's simply a gas. Here's your complete guide to what you'll be breathing tomorrow and where to breathe it.

► by **BUCKY McMAHON**

The yellow-on-green nitrox banner is spreading fast, colonizing the dive world like Kasparov playing Risk. Though once controversial—considered too dangerous, too technically demanding for recreational divers—nitrox came of age in 1996, by which time all the major certifying agencies had either introduced their own nitrox courses or sanctioned its use by recreational divers when trained by qualified instructors. Since then, nitrox certifications have soared. IANTD (International Association of Nitrox and Technical Divers), ANDI (American Nitrox Divers International) and TDI (Technical Divers International) have collectively issued more than 100,000 gas cards, while seeding the world market with thousands of nitrox instructors.

What's the Buzz About This Gas?

In a nutshell, nitrox—also called enriched air nitrox (EAN)—has less nitrogen and more oxygen than regular compressed air. Less nitrogen translates into longer bottom times. More oxygen, however, means strict depth limits and new risks.

If you're a newly certified diver,



Is Nitrox For You?

PROS

- ▶ Extended bottom times
- ▶ Shorter surface intervals
- ▶ Longer repetitive dives
- ▶ May increase margin of safety if used with air tables or air computer
- ▶ May reduce narcosis (still debated)
- ▶ May reduce fatigue (anecdotal evidence)
- ▶ May reduce incidence of asymptomatic DCS (not yet proved)

CONS

- ▶ Increased risk of central nervous system oxygen toxicity, which is likely to be fatal at depth
- ▶ Not safe beyond certain depths; imperative to remain within maximum operating depths
- ▶ Additional training required
- ▶ Additional dive planning required
- ▶ Requires dedicated nitrox cylinder, cleaned to oxygen specifications, except where membrane compressors are available
- ▶ Costs more than compressed air (typically about \$8 per fill), and will continue to be more expensive in the near future
- ▶ Not practical if other factors limit dive, such as cold or fatigue

But only your own needs and experience can determine if it appeals to you. Have you chafed at the no-decompression limits imposed by diving on compressed air, or have you felt that you've had time enough for your immediate diving goals? As you grow in diving experience, you may want to visit destinations where nitrox's greater flexibility in bottom times and surface intervals is essential for full enjoyment of a site. Then you'll know it's time for you to get your nitrox card.

Do You Want Safer Dives?

Sure, this sounds like a dumb question, and perhaps an unfair one. After all, if you follow safe diving practices with compressed air—not pushing the limits, making slow ascents, using safety stops—you are already very safe, indeed. But can you increase your safety by diving nitrox within air no-decompression limits? This question hasn't been answered satisfactorily yet, but increasing numbers of divers are using nitrox this way as an added safety measure.

"Physiologically, if you're using less nitrogen, you should be reducing your decompression risk," says Joel Dovenbarger, director of medical services at Divers Alert Network. DAN has begun to track the impact of EAN on diving safety, but it's too early in the study to draw meaningful conclusions. However, common sense (in

the absence, so far, of statistical evidence) tells us that the less nitrogen we absorb the better off our bodies will be, especially in the long run. And if you dive nitrox "as if it were air," using air tables or an air-based dive computer (which means giving up those longer bottom times), you will absorb significantly less nitrogen.

If you're over 30 years old, overweight, out of shape—in short, if you have any of the conditions that may predispose a diver to a higher risk of decompression sickness—then you might seriously consider the potential safety benefits of diving nitrox within air limits.

Kourosh Mahboubian, co-founder of Mad Dog Expeditions, says, "Why not add to your low-fat diet a high-oxygen diet?" In this sense, breathing nitrox is just another good thing you can do for your body, like skipping the cheeseburger and heading for the salad bar. And Bret Gilliam, president of Technical Divers International and veteran of most aspects of diving, including hyperbaric medicine, calls nitrox "the perfect old geezer's gas, because it's more forgiving than air."

Consider, also, that diving with nitrox for longer bottom times or for a margin of safety doesn't have to be strictly an either/or proposition. Simply by not maxing out the longer bottom time, you can preserve some of the safety buffer. In terms of nitrogen absorption, a conservative

BREATHING TOMORROW'S GAS ON TODAY'S WRECK:
CAYMAN BRAC'S MV CAPT. KEITH TIBBETTS.

ALEX KIRKBRIDE

you've probably already heard plenty about EAN, including rumors that nitrox will soon supplant air as the breathing gas of choice for sport divers—both for training and everyday use. Rumors aside, both the gas itself and the certification to use it are becoming so readily available that the choice of an appropriate gas for a particular dive will likely become second nature to the sport—like a golfer choosing among a set of clubs depending on the lie and the distance to the green.

So the question of whether or not you should become nitrox certified is really more a matter of when than if. Still, answering the following questions will help you make an informed decision about whether to walk or run to your nearest nitrox certifying agency.

Do You Want Longer Bottom Times?

Originally used by commercial organizations and the military, the expanded use of nitrox was stimulated by scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for its safety advantages over compressed air. Less nitrogen means less risk of decompression sickness. But divers can give up that safety buffer to attain extended bottom time, shorter surface intervals and longer repetitive dives. This is one of the strongest appeals of diving nitrox.

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nitrox dive can be a little longer and still be a little safer than a dive on compressed air.

Do You Intend to Dive a Lot?

If you are a very occasional diver, content to prowl tropical reefs a few times a year, then getting nitrox-certified may be overkill. But if you're avid, eager and ambitious to see the world under water, if you're planning a live-aboard trip or a dive-intensive vacation to a site where nitrox will be available, or if you want to sneak in a dive after work or a couple of

two-tankers over a weekend, then you're a candidate for another (debated) benefit of nitrox—the so-called “feel-good” effect.

Again, hard evidence that such a thing exists is lacking, but the anecdotal evidence is strong. Many of those who dive for a living—photographers, dive-masters and diving instructors—attest that the low-nitrogen diet helps them keep their faces out of their pasta plates after a long day of diving. If that wiped-out, post-dive fatigue is your body's way of saying that off-gassing is hard work,

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THE DIVE

Papua New Guinea top scored in *Rodale's Scuba Diving's* Sept/Oct article “The Ultimate Dive.” Mike Ball Dive Expeditions is building *Paradise Sport* for you to access those “Ultimate Dive” sites.

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knots allows unique itineraries. *Paradise Sport* has a huge dive deck with nitrox facilities, bountiful camera storage plus a photo and video lab. The “Paradise Lounge” is designed for video and slide presentations. Choose the dedicated dining room (that seats all guests) or alfresco deck for sumptuous dining.

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ANDI

PREREQUISITES ▶ Open Water certification
REQUIREMENTS ▶ Limited SafeAir User (LSU Level 1) includes 4-7 hours of lecture and two open water dives. Complete SafeAir User (CSU Level 2) entails 8-12 hours of lecture and two open water training dives. LSU Level 1 is not a prerequisite for CSU Level 2.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ Promotes stringent standards to ensure quality and consistency of EAN mixes through close relationships with retailers, and SafeAir, ANDI's trademark nitrox.
CALL ▶ (800) 229-2634

IANTD

PREREQUISITES ▶ Open Water certification
REQUIREMENTS ▶ Four hours of classroom study and two EAN dives.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ World's first nitrox certifying agency. Multilevel nitrox courses require students to complete specified amounts of bottom time prior to certification at a given level. Emphasis on continuing technical training.
CALL ▶ (305) 751-4873

IDEA

PREREQUISITES ▶ Students must be at least 18 years old and hold an Advanced Open Water certification.

REQUIREMENTS ▶ 8 hours of classroom; no required dives.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ Course emphasizes recreational use of EAN32 and EAN36; use of EAN tables stressed rather than mathematics.
CALL ▶ (904) 744-5554

NASDS

Recreational Nitrox certification offered is equivalent to ANDI's Limited SafeAir User course.

CALL ▶ (901) 767-7265

NASE

PREREQUISITES ▶ “NASE Safe N₂O₂” course may be taken in conjunction with Open Water certification; Open Water training dives are then made using EAN.

then diving nitrox may mean enjoying extended topside conscious-time as well.

Do You Have Confidence in Your Buoyancy Control?

By now you're wondering, what's the catch? What's the downside to diving with nitrox and its lower percentages of nitrogen? The potential downside is the higher percentage of oxygen. You'll remember from your open-water course that the oxygen in air becomes toxic at 218 feet, when its partial pressure reaches 1.6 atmospheres absolute (ATA). That

REQUIREMENTS ▶ Safe N₂O₂ Level One—3.5 hours classroom plus 2 EAN dives on one day; Level Two builds on and expands material of previous course, must take Level One before Level Two; requires six hours classroom and 2 EAN dives. Both classes use TDI text.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ Encourages EAN instruction with Open Water certification and emphasizes use of EAN for increased safety margins.

CALL ▶ (904) 264-4104, ask for Michael Ange

PADI

PREREQUISITES ▶ Advanced Open Water certification.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS ▶ Four hours of classroom instruction, plus at least two EAN dives.

WHAT SETS THEM APART ▶ PADI's multimedia and modular approach make for a glossy and very thorough course. Extra conservatism is built into PADI's EAN tables.

CALL ▶ (714) 540-7234

PDIC

PREREQUISITES ▶ Advanced diver with at least 40 dives.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS ▶ Two classroom sessions, three hours each. No required dives.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ Emphasizes recreational use of EAN32 and EAN36.

CALL ▶ (717) 342-1480

SSI

PREREQUISITES ▶ Open Water Diver certification.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS ▶ Four hours of classroom instruction. EAN dives optional.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ The course book is based on a practical question-and-answer format and is very easy to understand. Extra conservatism is built into SSI tables.

CALL ▶ (970) 482-0883

TDI

PREREQUISITES ▶ Open Water certification, minimum age 15.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS ▶ Four hours of classroom study. Two nitrox dives recommended.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ Brevity and readability of course booklet. Gets into math quickly and emphasizes physics; students learn limits and choose own level of conservatism.

CALL ▶ (207) 729-4201

YMCA

PREREQUISITES ▶ At least 15 years old and Advanced Open Water certification. Junior Nitrox for ages 12-14 if dives accompanied by an adult.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS ▶ 6 hours of classroom study plus 4 EAN dives.

WHAT SETS IT APART ▶ Comprehensive training approach emphasizes use of EAN with air tables for safety, not for extended bottom times.

CALL ▶ (770) 662-5172

was simply too deep to merit much discussion in the classroom. With nitrox, however, higher percentages of oxygen mean that oxygen partial pressures of 1.6 ATA can be attained within the recreational depth limit of 130 feet. For this reason, it is absolutely essential to observe the maximum operating depths of nitrox gases. For Nitrox I (32 percent oxygen, 68 percent nitrogen) the depth limit is 130 feet. For Nitrox II (36 percent oxygen, 64 percent nitrogen) the limit is 110 feet. Exceeding these limits puts a diver at risk of central nervous system oxygen toxicity,

and *grand mal* type seizures, which can be fatal at depth.

It is mainly because of this potential danger that some nitrox courses require an advanced open-water certification or its equivalent, but not all do (see sidebar). Those that don't have prerequisites beyond basic open-water certification rely on a diver's self-assessment of skill level. So, do you have confidence in your buoyancy control? If you do, and you have the good sense to use it, then the potential threat of oxygen toxicity is not much different from

or more daunting than the dangers of decompression sickness or an arterial gas embolism when diving regular air.

Are You Ready For More Sophisticated Dive Planning?

As you stand on the edge of the dive boat, regulator in your mouth and gauges secured, ready to giant-stride into the blue, do you feel task-loaded or perfectly at ease? Ready to add a few new pre-dive procedures?

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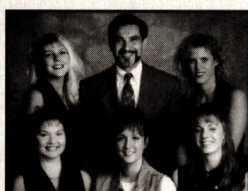
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CIRCLE NO. 42 ON READER SERVICE CARD

For starters, diving with nitrox means taking more responsibility for the contents of your scuba cylinder. If you think you're diving Nitrox I, with a maximum operating depth of 130 feet, but are in fact diving Nitrox II, with an MOD of 110 feet, you put yourself at risk of oxygen toxicity. So you'll always analyze, or witness the analysis of, the contents of the tank to verify the percentage of oxygen.

If you're diving nitrox to extend your bottom time, you'll need to find your intended depth on an equivalent air depth table, then take the new depth and find it on an air-based dive table to determine your nitrogen no-decompression limit. In addition to monitoring nitrogen limits, you must track your oxygen exposure time and stay within those bounds as well. Nitrox is the driving force behind a new breed of programmable computers that allow you to punch in your oxygen percentage and enjoy multi-level dive profiles just as with air computers. Still, you must earn that extra bottom time, or the buffer of safety, the old-fashioned way—with a little more head-work.

Are You Ready For More Training?

If you answered yes to most of the questions above and are ready to wear the green on your tank, what should you expect from the course itself? Expect some history, some physics and physiology, and a little math. Bring a simple calculator, but don't sweat the equations. It's really kind of fun when your calculations match up with the dive tables. The average cost of the course is about \$150 and usually includes two supervised nitrox dives, though some courses don't require any diving at all. For these, you'll need to demonstrate your ability to plan the dives, but not to dive your plans. You won't need to buy any new equipment for the course.

Above all, expect some unexpected dividends from your nitrox class. Your open-water course was all about nitrogen and nitrogen limits; the nitrox course will be mostly about oxygen and oxygen limits. When you put the two together, you gain a kind of binocular vision of respiration under water and under pressure. Don't be surprised (or be happily surprised) when the physics and physiology of diving suddenly click as they come into a new and more profound focus. You may find yourself relishing the details of dive planning and planning to go on to further challenges.

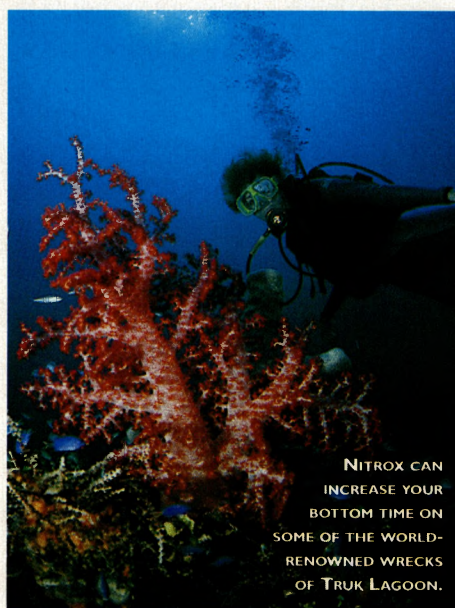
10 TOP Nitrox Dives

The Live-aboards

You can drop that Grisham novel and instead get nitrox certified en route to the boat's first dive site on some of the best-known live-aboards. The Peter Hughes *Moon Dancer* in the Red Sea, *Sun Dancer II* in Palau and *Wave Dancer* in Belize offer on-board enriched air courses for \$150—and no charge for EAN fills (except on *Moon Dancer*). The Aggressor Fleet in Cayman; Cocos Island, Costa Rica; Kona, Hawaii; Truk and Palau feature nitrox and rebreather courses—\$150 for the nitrox certification, \$300 for the rebreather course, or a \$350 combo. Dancer and Aggressor divers breathe nitrox for safety (with air tables), not for extended bottom times. **Contact:** Peter Hughes Diving Inc. at (800) 9-DANCER or Aggressor Fleet at (800) 348-2628.

Truk Lagoon

The world's best wreck diving, as voted by RSD readers, lies within nitrox ranges. On wrecks nitrox is particularly beneficial since the dive profiles tend to be more square, with the diver spending more time at a constant depth, than during multi-level coral reef diving. By optimizing your nitrox mix and diving a nitrox computer, you can significantly increase your no-deco time on such historic hulks as *Fujikawa Maru* and the *Heian Maru*. **Contact:** Aggressor Fleet at (800) 348-2628.



NITROX CAN
INCREASE YOUR
BOTTOM TIME ON
SOME OF THE WORLD-
RENOUNDED WRECKS
OF TRUK LAGOON.

The USS San Diego

Seventeen miles south-southeast of New Jersey's Fire Island Inlet, this World War I heavy cruiser lies at a max depth of 110 feet. That puts her within the maximum operating depth (MOD) of Nitrox II (EAN36), and Yankee wreckers have capitalized on the extended bottom time. Lots of history, lots of marine life, and a favorite site for artifact hunters. **Contact:** R/V *Wahoo*, (516) 928-3849; or *Sea Hawk*, (516) 499-9107.

The Papoose

"Whoever invented nitrox seemed to have us in mind; it's perfect for what we do here," says Paul Childress of the Olympus Dive Center in Morehead City, N.C. Among the things they do there is dive the wreck of the *Papoose*, a World War II tanker that is home to the snaggle-toothed sand shark. The recommended blend for this 120-foot dive is EAN30, which yields a 20-minute bottom time while preserving a safety buffer. **Contact:** Olympus Dive Center, (800) 992-1258.

Bahamas Shark Dives

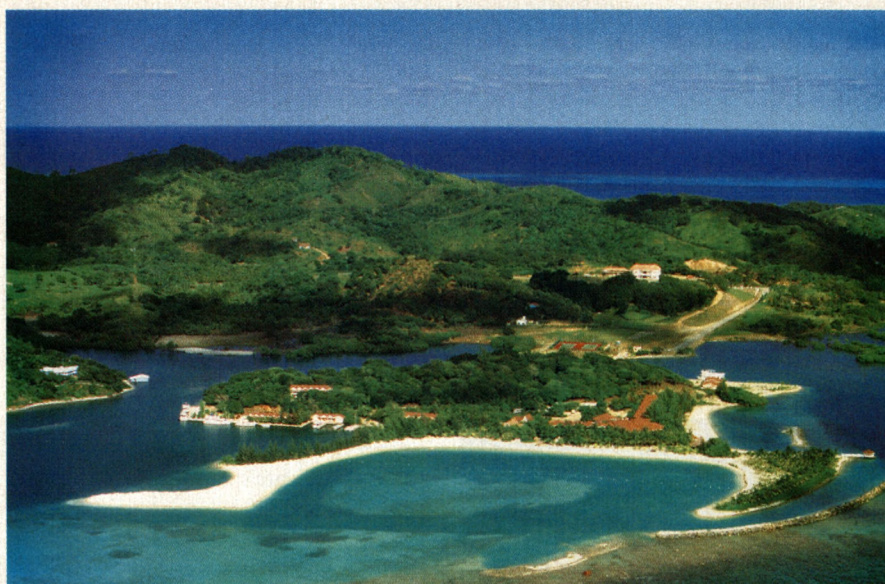
You meet them first along a wall at about 70 feet, and on the second dive you and about a hundred sharks sit down to dinner on a sandy bottom at 50 feet. These relatively shallow dives call for Nitrox II (EAN36), which gives you more bottom time than you'll ever need. So while the sharks pig out on protein, you take in less nitrogen. **Contact:** Stuart Cove's Dive South Ocean, (800) 646-3333; Dive, Dive, Dive, (800) 368-3483; Nassau Scuba Centre, (888) 962-7726; Xanadu Undersea Adventures, (800) 327-8150; Sunskiff Divers, (800) 331-5884.

The Palawan

Encrusted with anenomes and scallops, resting upright at 120 to 130 feet off Redondo Beach, Calif., the *Palawan* is a favorite wreck for West Coast nitrox divers. The 130-foot max depth means you should dial Nitrox I (EAN32) for extended bottom times. **Contact:** Just Add Water Sports, (310) 581-2717.

The Empire Mica

The Gulf Coast's premier wreck, the 465-foot long *Empire Mica*, took two torpedoes amidships on June 29, 1942, and went down in flames off Cape San Blas on the Florida Panhandle. Lying upright in 105 feet of water, the popular wreck features long ladders leading below decks, into compartments teeming with



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tropicals. Nitrox I (EAN32) gives history buffs ample time to prowl. **Contact:** Diver's Den (Tyndall location only), (904) 871-6889; Dixie Divers, (904) 914-9988; Panama City Dive Center, (904) 235-3390.

The Duane and The Eagle

Divers swear by the *Eagle* for its resident jewfish, or by the *Duane* for the barracuda. You might see tarpon at either site. Both U.S. Coast Guard vessels were sunk as artificial reefs in 100 to 120 feet of

water, ideal Nitrox I range. "The younger divers use Nitrox I for longer below times, and the older divers—I don't mean old, I mean over 40—use it for greater safety and less fatigue," says Tavernier Dive Center's John Riddick. **Contact:** Tavernier Dive Center, (800) 787-9797; Lady Cyana Divers, Inc., (800) 221-8171; Florida Keys Dive Center, (800) 433-8946; Conch Republic Divers, (800) 274-DIVE; Ocean Divers Inc., (800) 451-1113; Captain Slate's Atlantis Dive Center, (800) 331-3483; Kelly's on the Bay & Aqua Nuts Divers, (800) 226-0415; Quiescence Diving Services Inc., (305) 451-2440; Amy Slate's Amaray Dive Resort, (800) 426-6729.

Bloody Bay Wall, Little Cayman

If you want extra bottom time on the Caribbean's top-rated wall (according to RSD readers), whether to ogle the 6,000-foot depths of the Cayman Trench or to photograph the monstrous barrel sponges and light-eating strawberry vase sponges, grab a tank of Nitrox I, which will do just fine for the 110-foot depth limit in the Caymans. **Contact:** Little Cayman Beach Resort, (800) 327-3835; Southern Cross Club, (800) 899-2582; Brac Reef Beach Resort, (800) 327-3835.

Nitrox's 'Net Gains

Tell your favorite search engine to search on "nitrox" and more than a thousand entries will bubble up from the World Wide Web. So you don't go into nitrogen overload, we picked five favorites:

diver.ocean.washington.edu/nitroxpage.html

home.earthlink.net/~rothner/karntrox.htm

scubacentral.com/about/ead.html

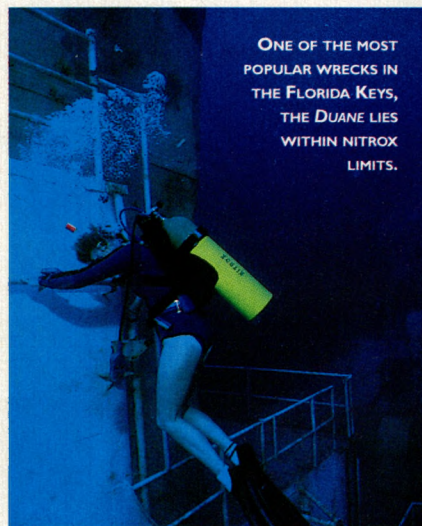
icon.co.za/~jan/dive/andi.html

www.webcorp.ca/IANTD_canada/

Palau

The introduction of nitrox to this dramatic archipelago has given divers far more options and flexibility when exploring the outside drop-offs and has largely eliminated the need for drifting deco hangs after the third dive or so. Combine some of the world's most perfect reefs with dynamic marine life and you'll want to embrace the benefits of nitrox. **Contact:** Sam's Dive Tours, (011) 680-488-1062; Aggressor Fleet, (800) 348-2628; Peter Hughes Diving Inc., (800) 9-DANCER. 

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READER RATINGS

Bahamas

If the Bahamas were any closer, you could drive there on a long weekend. In fact, divers standing on Miami Beach are closer to Bimini and Grand Bahama than they are to Key West, just down the road.

But fortunately, the Bahamas don't end there. The 700-lime-stone cay archipelago is sprinkled over a patch of Atlantic the size of Colorado, from Walker's Cay north of Abaco to Little and Great Inagua, just a stone's throw from the Turks & Caicos.

Our readers bestowed more high marks on Walker's Cay than any other Bahamian isle. Resident nurse and reef sharks helped it earn first place in the archipelago for big animals, fish life and photography, but it won first for health of reefs, value and overall on its own.

New Providence—home of Nassau, political and economic hub—received top honors for beginner and wreck diving. The island also took second for wall diving, and third for big animals and overall score. San Salvador is the best in the Bahamas for wall diving, second for advanced diving and health of reefs, and third for value, photography and fish life. The Out Islands—including Abaco, Andros, Cay Sal, the Exumas and Harbour Island—took first in snorkeling, second in photography and overall, and third in advanced diving, health of reefs and walls. Grand Bahama took second for beginner diving, as did Bimini for value.

Dive Operators

Overall :	B+
Staff :	A
Boat & Facilities:	B-
Value :	A-

Bill & Nowdla Keefe's Bimini Undersea

Bimini, Bahamas
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e-mail: INFO@BIMINIUNDERSEA.COM
web: WWW.BIMINIUNDERSEA.COM

Boat length/max. number of divers: 42'/26, 30'/12.
Morning dives/times: 2/9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. **Afternoon dives/times:** 1/2 p.m. to 4 p.m. **Night dives:** Tuesdays and Fridays. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, SSI. **Primary resort affiliations:** Several; call for details.

Reader comments ► *Well-run operation ... Divers were separated by experience ... Very laid-back.*

Overall :	A-
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	A-
Value :	A-

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 San Salvador, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 258-2633,
 (242) 331-2000



Boat length/max. number of divers: 48'/48, (2) 42'/45.
Morning dives/times/price: 2/8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m./\$35 (\$125 for entire week). **Afternoon**



BAHAMAS OUT ISLANDS (ABACO, ANDROS, CAY SAL, EXUMAS, HARBOUR ISLAND)

Photography	88.1
Advanced Diving	87.0
Value	85.4
Health of Reefs	80.8
Fish Life	77.8
Beginner Diving	77.0
Snorkeling	76.4
Overall	75.0
Quality of Walls	69.6
Shore Diving	67.6
Big Animals	63.1
Quality of Wrecks	52.0

NOTE: All scores are based on a response of almost 10,000 surveys. Overall scores for dive operators are derived by averaging their individual scores based on staff, boat and facilities, value and quality of rental gear (not listed).

dives/times/price: 1/2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m./\$35. **Night dives:** Wednesdays. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, Club Med Resort Course. **Primary resort affiliation:** Club Med. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ Boats were excellent but crowded ... Diving is excellent for intermediate and advanced divers.

Overall :	B+
Staff :	A
Boat & Facilities:	B
Value :	A-

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web: WWW.DIVEDIVEDIVE.COM

Boat length/max. number of divers: 40'/20, 37'/12, 30'/6. **Morning dives/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m./\$65. **Afternoon dives/times/price:** 2/1 p.m. to 5 p.m./\$65. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, SSI, PDIC, YMCA, CMAS, TDI, ANDI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Dive, Dive, Dive, Ltd. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ Efficient ... Good shuttle service from hotel ... Older boat ... A great facility ... An active facility for nitrox diving and training ... Nice, friendly staff ... A place to go for serious diving ... All dive sites are great and the people are really friendly.

Overall :	A-
Staff :	A
Boat & Facilities:	A-
Value :	A

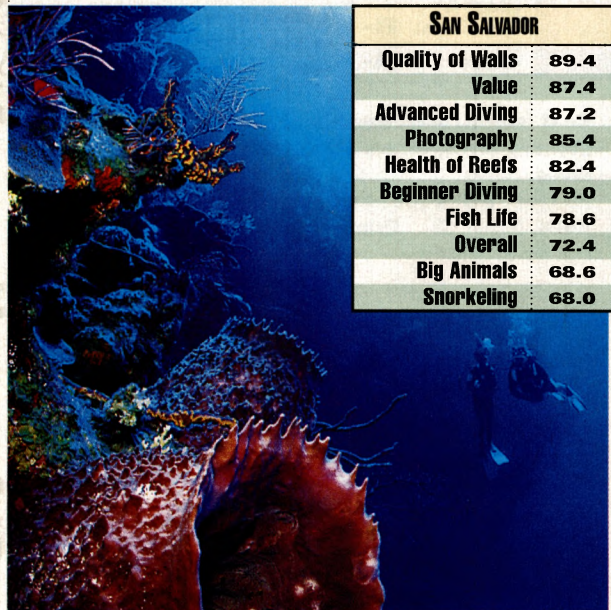
Nassau Scuba Centre

P.O. Box 21766,
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33335
Tel: (888) 962-7728,
(954) 462-3400
e-mail: NEALWATSON@AOL.COM
web: WWW.NEALWATSON.COM/NASSAU.HTM



Boat length/max. number of divers: 42'/20, 40'/20, 30'/15. **Morning dives/times/price:** 2/9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m./\$65. **Afternoon dives/times/price:** 2/1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m./\$65. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, SSI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Nassau Beach Hotel. **Resort on-site:** No.

Reader comments ▶ I was impressed with the



SAN SALVADOR	
Quality of Walls	89.4
Value	87.4
Advanced Diving	87.2
Photography	85.4
Health of Reefs	82.4
Beginner Diving	79.0
Fish Life	78.6
Overall	72.4
Big Animals	68.6
Snorkeling	68.0

instruction given to me for my divemaster certification ... Has a classroom/video room as well as a high-tech facility for nitrox diving ... Great shark-feeding dives ... Very courteous and professional ... The staff made our trip wonderful ... Our divemaster for the shark feed was great.

Overall :	A-
Staff :	A
Boat & Facilities:	B+
Value :	A

Riding Rock Divers

Cockburn Town,
San Salvador, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 272-1492,
(954) 359-8353
e-mail: RIDINGROCK@AOL.COM

Boat length/max. number of divers: 45'/24, 42'/20, 41'/20. **Morning dives/times/price:** 2/9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m./\$60. **Afternoon dives/times/price:** 1/2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m./\$40. **Night dives:** Every day except Saturdays. **E-6 processing:** Yes. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, SSI, YMCA. **Primary resort affiliation:** Riding Rock Inn. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ They let us dive our computers with a 130-foot and 500-psi limit ... Superior dive operation, first-class service ... Never had to change a tank once ... Boats in good shape ... Excellent dive staff.

Overall :	A-
Staff :	A
Boat & Facilities:	B+
Value :	A-

Scuba Bimini

1100 Lee Wagener Blvd.,
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33315
Tel: (800) 848-4073, (954) 359-2705
e-mail: SCUBABIMINI@WISNET.COM
web: WWW.SCUBABIMINI.COM

Boat length/max. number of divers: 42'/22, 38'/22, 27'/8. **Morning dives/departure time/price:** 2/8:30 a.m./package price. **Afternoon dive/times/price:** 2/1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m./package price. **Night dives:** Wednesdays and Saturdays. **E-6 processing:** No. **Primary resort affiliation:** Bimini Beach Club. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ Great value for groups ... Great jet boat ... The staff let you dive your own profile within the recreational diving limits ... Operation was efficient with color-coded tanks on the boat which indicated first or second dive and the tanks were filled on board ... Our dive equipment was left on the boat and set up prior to each dive trip by the staff for our entire stay ... The staff are extremely friendly and will go out of their way to assure that guests are satisfied.

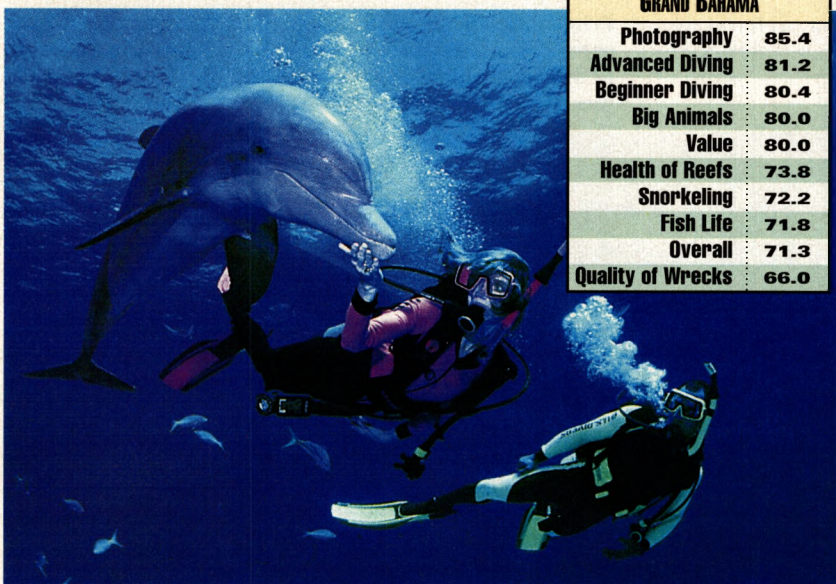
Overall :	B+
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	B+
Value :	A-

Stuart Cove's Dive South Ocean

P.O. Box CB11697,
Nassau, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 646-3333,
(242) 362-4571

Boat length/max. number of divers: (2) 44'/20, (3) 40'/20, 30'/11. **Morning dives/times/price:** 2/9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m./\$70. **Afternoon dives/times/price:** 2/1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m./\$70. **E-6 processing:** Yes. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, SSI, PDIC, YMCA. **Primary resort affiliation:** South Ocean Golf & Beach Resort. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ Excellent dive staff, allowed diving according to ability; good underwater tours ... For my



GRAND BAHAMA	
Photography	85.4
Advanced Diving	81.2
Beginner Diving	80.4
Big Animals	80.0
Value	80.0
Health of Reefs	73.8
Snorkeling	72.2
Fish Life	71.8
Overall	71.3
Quality of Wrecks	66.0

Boat length/max. number of divers: 45'/24, 43'/20, 35'/16.
Morning dives/times/price: 2/9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m./\$75. **Afternoon dives/times/price:** 1/2 p.m. to 4 p.m./\$50. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, SSI, YMCA. **Primary resort affiliation:** Walkers Cay Hotel. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ Package deal of diving, lodging, dining and Junkanoo New Year's party added to the unforgettable shark dive ... Excellent diving, away from shopping and tourist traps ... Truly a wonderful dive operation ... Dedicated to diving and fun ... One of the best operators I have had the pleasure of diving with.

first real dives, Stuart Cove's was excellent; the staff made me feel very comfortable and self-assured ... Very well run; dive sites are close and varied ... Top-quality and a good value ... I am a handicapped diver and Stuart Cove's was accessible and very helpful on and off the boat.

Overall :	B+
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	B
Value :	A-

Underwater Explorers Society (UNEXSO)

P.O. Box 42433, Freeport, Grand Bahama, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 992-3483, (954) 351-9889
e-mail: INFO@UNEXSO.COM
web: WWW.UNEXSO.COM

Boat length/max. number of divers: 43'/18, 42'/22, (3) 40'/20, 38'/20, (2) 32'/14. **Morning dives/times/price:** 1 or 2/8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m./package price. **Afternoon dives/times/price:** 1/2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m./package price. **E-6 processing:** Yes. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, NAUI, SSI, YMCA. **Primary resort affiliation:** Several; call for details.

Reader comments ▶ Good boats, lots of staff, very safety-conscious ... Dolphin and shark dives were wonderful ... They don't have heads on their boats ... The dive operation was very efficient ... Excellent value ... The staff are always helpful; constant improvements are seen each trip ... The dolphin experience is a must ... Buy a copy of your dolphin dive on video (ready in 30 mins.) ... Wide variety of diving ... I appreciate the staff bringing your BC and tank to you at the back of the boat and taking them when you reboarded the boat.

Overall :	A-
Staff :	A+
Boat & Facilities:	A-
Value :	A+

Walkers Cay Undersea Adventures

P.O. Box 21766, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33335
Tel: (800) 513-5257, (954) 462-3400
e-mail: NEALWATSON@AOL.COM
web: WWW.NEALWATSON.COM/
 WALKERS.HTM



Overall :	B+
Staff :	A-
Boat & Facilities:	B
Value :	A-

Xanadu Undersea Adventures

P.O. Box F40118, Freeport, Grand Bahama, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 327-8150, (242) 352-3811
e-mail: DIVEXUA@BATELNET.BS
web: WWW.BAHAMASVG.COM/
 XANADUDIVE.HTM

Boat length/max. number of divers: 48'/25, 42'/15, 38'/10. **Morning dives/times/price:** 2/8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m./\$55. **Afternoon dives/times/price:** 1 or 2/1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. and 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m./\$32 or \$55. **E-6 processing:** No. **Certifying agencies:** PADI, SSI. **Primary resort affiliation:** Xanadu Beach Hotel and Marina. **Resort on-site:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ People were very friendly and nice ... Divers had no say about where we would dive each day ... The dive shop and its staff were very helpful and patient ... Well-organized and efficient on the boat ... Took BC and tank getting on board and set up new tank for next dive ... Free pick-up and return to hotel ... Very personal service.

Live-Aboard

Overall :	A
Staff :	A
Boat & Facilities:	A
Value :	A

Nekton Pilot

520 S.E. 32nd St., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316
Tel: (800) 899-6753, (954) 463-9324
web: WWW.NEKTONCRUISES.COM

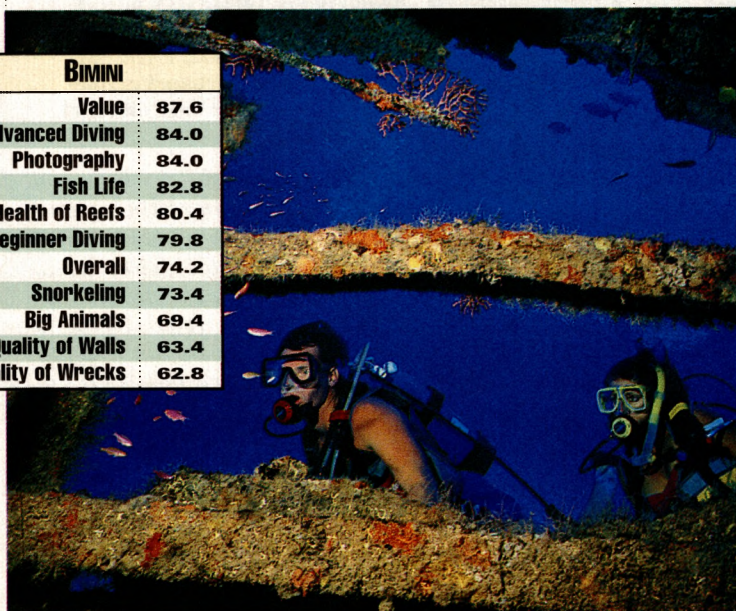


Boat length/number of cabins/max. number of divers: 78' x 40'/15/30. **Price of week-long cruise:** \$1,195 to \$1,495. **Max. number of dives allowed per day:** Unlimited. **Cabins have private baths:** Yes. **Cabins are air-conditioned:** Yes. **E-6 processing:** Yes.

Reader comments ▶ No seasickness; the boat floats and travels like a dream ... Very stable in the water ... Very personable staff, very exciting shark dive ... Trip, boat, crew and dive location were all great—it will spoil you ... We did hit some choppy seas but the

Nekton's design really did make things pretty stable ... A great experience ... The only warm-water boat-based diving where I didn't feel sick or use motion-sickness drugs.

BIMINI	
Value	87.6
Advanced Diving	84.0
Photography	84.0
Fish Life	82.8
Health of Reefs	80.4
Beginner Diving	79.8
Overall	74.2
Snorkeling	73.4
Big Animals	69.4
Quality of Walls	63.4
Quality of Wrecks	62.8



STEPHEN FRANK

Accommodations

Overall	: A
Service	: A-
Restaurant	: A+
Facilities	: A+
Value	: A-

Atlantis Resort

P.O. Box N4777,
Nassau, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 321-3000,
(242) 363-3000

e-mail: WWW.TRAVELWEB.COM/
SUNINTL.HTM



Price of double for one night: From \$149 to \$360.
Number of rooms: 1,147. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** Yes. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Diver's Haven.

Reader comments ► Strongly recommend.

Overall	: A-
Service	: B+
Restaurant	: B+
Facilities	: A-
Value	: A-

Bahamas Princess Resort and Casino

Grand Bahama, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 223-1818,
(954) 359-2804

Price of double for one night: \$98 to \$128. **Number of rooms:** 965. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** Yes. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** No. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx.

Overall	: B
Service	: B
Restaurant	: B
Facilities	: C
Value	: B+

Bimini Beach Club

Bimini, Bahamas
Tel: (888) 8-BIMINI, (954) 725-0919
e-mail: BIMINI@GATE.NET

Price of double for one night: \$90 to \$95. **Number of rooms:** 40. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** No. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard. **Dive operation on premises:** Scuba Bimini and Bahama Island Adventure.

Reader comments ► Hotel rooms, while clean, need to be rehabilitated ... Adequate for a dive vacation, but without TV, phone, radio or any activities other than diving, it is not good for a family vacation.

Overall	: A-
Service	: A-
Restaurant	: A
Facilities	: A+
Value	: A

Club Med Columbus Isle

San Salvador, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 258-2633,
(242) 331-2000



Price of double for one night: \$161 per person, per night (add \$35 for diving; summer 1997). **Number of rooms:** 286. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** No. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Club Med Dedicated Dive Program.

Reader comments ► After diving you can sail, windsurf, water-ski, and participate in many other activities ... The food is second to none ... The resort is fabulous ... Great for couples and singles, but no activities for children.

Overall	: B
Service	: B+
Restaurant	: B+
Facilities	: B-
Value	: B+

Orange Hill Inn

P.O. Box N8583,
Nassau, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 805-5485,
(242) 327-7157

Price of double for one night: \$89. **Number of rooms:** 32. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** No. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** No. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx. **Dive operation on premises:** Nassau Scuba Centre.

Overall	: B-
Service	: B-
Restaurant	: B-
Facilities	: A-
Value	: B-

Radisson Cable Beach

P.O. Box N4914,
Nassau, Bahamas
Tel: (800) 432-0221

Price of double for one night: \$135 to \$225. **Number of rooms:** 700. **Restaurant on premises:** Yes. **Scheduled activities for kids:** Yes. **Babysitting:** Yes. **Beachfront property:** Yes. **Rooms have phones:** Yes. **Air-conditioning:** Yes. **Credit cards accepted:** Visa, MasterCard, AmEx, Carte Blanche, Diners' Club.

Reader comments ► The resort was undergoing



would-be baggage handlers milling around pounced on the lizard and scooped it up with a practiced hand, holding his prize aloft. They still eat iguana in this part of the world and I can only assume that the hitchhiking lizard would pay his airfare as somebody's entrée that night.

There are no paved roads on Guanaja. There aren't unpaved ones either. People get around this nine- by three-mile, dagger-shaped island by boat. In fact, of the 10,000 or so residents, most live in Bonacca, a crowded stilt-city built on, around and over a

small neighboring cay. That leaves the rest of the mountainous island to the iguanas, a few private homes and a handful of dive resorts.

The Diving ▶

The coral formations here are more dramatic than anywhere else in the Bay Islands and start close to shore. Along the north shore, shallow reefs begin in 10 to 20 feet, then slope steeply down to 60 to 80 feet. Off the south shore, the wall starts in 40 feet of water, then drops almost vertically to 120 feet and a narrow shelf before dropping off again into the deep.

DIVE IN



Getting There

American, Continental and TACA airlines offer regular service to the mainland towns of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula from U.S. cities. From there, a variety of smaller carriers including Islena, Caribbean Air and SOSA fly twin-engine propeller planes to the coastal town of La Ceiba and the Bay Islands. TACA also offers direct flights to Roatan once a week each from New Orleans, Miami and Houston.

For the smoothest trip, let your resort or booking office arrange flights within the country for you. Schedules are subject to frequent, unannounced changes and a phone reservation may not always translate into a seat on the plane. Also plan your trips to avoid travel within Honduras and the Bay Islands on Sundays, when there are few or no flights available on the smaller airlines.

Currently, Cayos Cochinos is accessible only by boat from La Ceiba. Plantation Beach Resort makes regular Saturday trips to La Ceiba to drop off and pick up customers.



Weather

There is very little seasonal variation in daytime highs that hit the mid-80Fs and cool to mid-60Fs at night. Near constant trade winds provide cooling breezes, but without them, it can get hot and humid. The rainy season is from December to January, but rain seldom will cause you to miss dives.



Water Conditions

Like the topside weather, water temperatures stay fairly constant: in the low 80Fs in summer and high 70Fs in winter. Bay Island waters are rich in plankton, lowering vis to an average of 80 feet, less when storms and runoff cloud the water. Peaks of 100 feet or more are possible, however.



Money

The Honduran lempira (valued at press time at 13 lempiras to one U.S. dollar) is the official currency, but dollars are readily accepted throughout the islands. Credit cards are widely accepted by resorts and dive shops.



Electricity

110 volts/60 cycles like home, but most island electrical systems are prone to current surges. Use caution when plugging in sensitive electronics.



Health

Food and water at resorts are gringo-safe (ask before drinking if you aren't specifically told that tap water is safe), but outside your resort stick to bottled water only. Biting insects—sand flies and mosquitoes in particular—are the number one nuisance in the islands. Be sure to use an effective insect repellent. Heavy concentrations aren't necessary unless you're trekking into the jungle, but you will need to wear repellent whenever you're out of the water.



Travel Savvy

Pack light on clothes (the dress code is always casual) and use the extra space to bring any and everything else you might need.



Just in Case

There is a recompression chamber on Roatan (011-504-45-1515).

ROATAN Half Moon Bay Wall

What you'll see ▶ A sloping wall bursting with tube, barrel and azure vase sponges, as well as deepwater gorgonians and giant anemones, that sinks down to 130 feet and beyond. Go deep to encounter moray eels and Cozumel-sized grouper; stay shallow if you like black durgon, blue tang, blue angels and schools of creole wrasse. **What you might see** ▶ Huge cubera snapper with an entourage of remoras and juvenile bar jacks.

Fish Den

What you'll see ▶ A shallow reef that starts in 10 feet of water and is cracked with deep sand channels and swarmed by everything with fins and gills—from juvenile spotfin hogfish in the folds of lettuce leaf coral, to terminal phase blue parrotfish big enough to warrant their own remora escorts. Blue tangs, grunts and yellowtails stampede across the reef along the drop-off that starts at 35 feet and tumbles to 130. **What you might see** ▶ Large spider crabs hanging from the tops of small grottoes. Bring a light.

Herbie's Place

What you'll see ▶ Enormous barrel sponges, giant sea fans and dense fields of gorgonians soaking up the nutrients of the current-swept west end. Big grouper, large schools of creole wrasse, horse-eye jacks, and big barracuda are regular hosts to divers drifting along the wall that falls from 20 to 150 feet. **What you might see** ▶ Pompano, kingfish and the occasional permit, not to mention sharks and sea turtles patrolling the drop-off.

Stovall Reef

What you'll see ▶ More cleaning stations per square foot than on any other Bay Islands reef. Photographers, bring the macro kit to catch those tiny Pederson cleaner shrimp and neon gobies dutifully manning their stations among azure vase sponges and striated layers of plate corals from 60 to 130-plus feet. Approach cautiously so as not to spook the docile grouper and stoplight parrotfish getting their makeovers. **What you might see** ▶ Some nice-sized snapper milling around.

Lighthouse Reef

What you'll see ▶ A mask-to-eye view of the bug-eyed grouper and curious yellowtails that mob you from giant stride to safety stop. The sun-dappled shallows are a grab bag of corals and Caribbean reef fish, and there are swim-through tunnels formed by overgrown plate corals on a reef slope that drops from 60 to 130-plus feet.

What you might see ▶ The occasional tuft of black coral if you venture deep on the wall.

Peter's Place

What you'll see ▶ Grouper, grouper and more grouper, as well as schooling snapper and toothy moray eels. Black durgon crowd the shallows and a row of pillar corals line the drop-off. **What you might see** ▶ Brittle and basket stars, octopus, lobster and big crabs if you dive here at night.

Wrasse Hole

What you'll see ▶ Jagged holes, tunnels and deep channels that are the backdrop for almost every variety of wrasse in the ID books, including creole, bluehead, yellowhead and clown. The reef starts shallow (about 10 feet) and features blue runners, black durgon, as well as four-eye butterflyfish. The sloping wall, marked by occasional pinnacles, gets as deep as 75 feet but you'll usually bottom out in the sand at 60. **What you might see** ▶ At night, you'll find octopuses flashing colors as they ooze across the reef.

GUANAJA

Bayman Bay Drop-off

What you'll see ▶ A mind-boggling overhang from 10 to 180 feet overgrown with azure vase sponges, red rope sponges and deepwater gorgonians. Follow your divemaster into the myriad caves filled with glassy sweepers and end the dive in the company of angelfish and bluehead wrasse. **What you might see** ▶ A variety of juvenile eels hiding in tiny coral crevices.

Jim's Silver Lode

What you'll see ▶ Nassau, tiger, yellowfin and black grouper mobbing divers for most of the dive in anticipation of a free meal. The wall starts at 50 feet and drops down to 130. Inside the famous coral tunnel you'll find pasty massive schools of silversides and a few docile rock hind. Along the deeper portions of the wall, watch for Spanish mackerel and schooling jacks. **What you might see** ▶ Everything pelagic, including turtles, sharks and eagle rays.

Jado Trader

What you'll see ▶ 200 feet of encrusted freighter lying on its starboard side in 110 feet of water—the Bay Islands' signature wreck dive. You can explore the bridge and open holds, but deeper penetration is not safe. Keep an eye on the blue water overhead for horse-eye jacks and greater amberjack. **What you might see** ▶ Schools of silversides in the summer months, and the occasional jewfish.

The Pavilions

What you'll see ▶ A sloping wall from 10 to 60 feet where you can worm your way through sun-dappled grottoes, deep coral crevices and swim-through caves filled with silversides and glassy sweepers. Take a light to explore the interiors of these coral mazes but be sure to follow your divemaster's lead to avoid getting lost in a world best suited to the snapper and soft corals. **What you might see** ▶ Stingrays and nurse sharks cruising the sand patch at the base of the reef.

Afternoon Delight

What you'll see ▶ A mini-wall that drops from 30 feet to a sand flat at 60 feet with plenty of sponges, whitespotted filefish, and happy divers whiling away the lazy time between lunch and happy hour. **What you might see** ▶ Shy nurse sharks and the occasional stingray in the sand.

The Pinnacle

What you'll see ▶ A large watchtower of stony corals, sprouting with gorgonians and wire corals as it rises up from 140 feet at the intersection of a wide sand chute and a coral wall. Photo tip: The needle-eye crack in the center is a hiding place for big grouper and spotted drum. The pinnacle peaks at 60 feet and is home to a variety of juvenile reef fish. **What you might see** ▶ Big snapper sniffing around for a juvenile reef fish snack.

Wonderful Reef

What you'll see ▶ A sloping wall from 20 to 60 feet and a wide sand highway running parallel to shore. Small coral holes and grottoes shelter snapper, grouper and all manner of juvenile reef fish from blue chromis to black durgon. **What you might see** ▶ Nurse sharks and spotted eagle rays cruising the white sand highway.

UTILA

West End

What you'll see ▶ A sloping wall from 40 to 150 feet with a thick beard of lacy black corals from 90 feet down. Look for spotted drum in the nooks and big dog snapper and bar jacks cruising the wall. **What you might see** ▶ Spotted drum in coral crevices and schools of Atlantic spadefish if you keep an eye on open water.

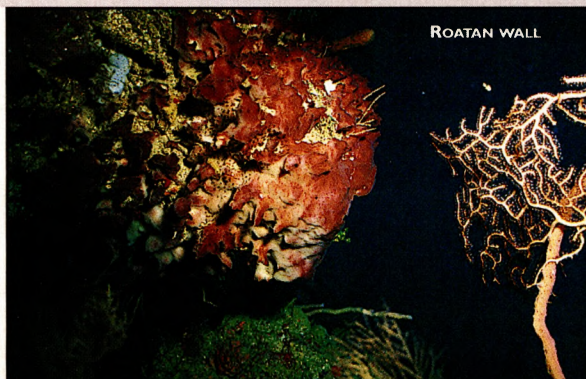
Silver Gardens

What you'll see ▶ A vertical mini-wall from 15 to 60 feet that makes a great afternoon or night dive. Day or night, you can find swarms of juvenile reef fish, large schools of squid and the occasional octopus oozing across the reef in a Mardi Gras display of flashing colors. Overhangs at the base of the wall shelter gardens of lettuce leaf algae and the occasional small black coral tufts.

D. HOLDEN BAILEY



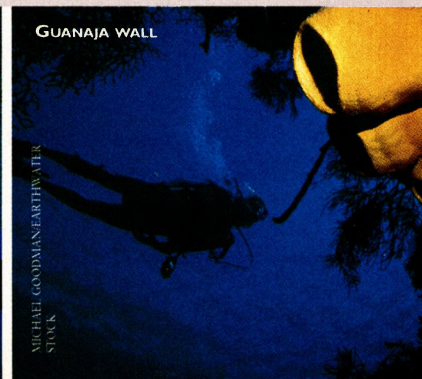
ROATAN



ROATAN WALL



ROATAN WALL



GUANAJA WALL

MICHAEL GOODMAN/EMPHATIC

Best Bottom Times

What you might see ▶ Grouper, snapper or barracuda patrolling the drop-off.

Rocky Point

What you'll see ▶ The shallows (15 feet) are a cheese grater of lettuce leaf, fire, knob-by finger and elkhorn corals—so take it easy on the giant stride. From the shallows to the reef slope, it's a mosh pit of blue chromis and juvenile wrasse. The wall here slopes steeply from 40 to 110 feet and springs with tangles of wire corals, row-pore sponges and black coral trees. **What you might see** ▶ Big jolthead porgies cruising the wall.

Black Hills

What you'll see ▶ A Superdome of hard and soft corals swarming with schools of jacks, scrawled filefish, grouper, snapper. This seamount rises to within 45 feet of the surface and shelters everything from current-swept gorgonians to ocean triggerfish and the occasional sea turtle.

What you might see ▶ Whale sharks, if conditions are right.

Willy's Hole

What you'll see ▶ Depends on which direction you take from the mooring buoy. Head west to find the arch that leads into a cave at 70 feet, or go east and watch the wall drop beneath you to 280 feet. Large elkhorn corals in the shallows give way to a line of pillar corals at the drop-off. Big deepwater gorgonians grow across the gaps of four large crevices with white sand bottoms where you'll find flounder, stingrays and the occasional jawfish. **What you might see** ▶ A spotted drum or maybe a whale shark.

Barracuda Banks

What you'll see ▶ A series of seamounts with amazingly large barrel sponges—some 10 feet tall and six feet across. Of course the name-sake predators are here in large numbers as are green and hawksbill turtles and schooling jacks.

What you might see ▶ Black-tip sharks.

Blackish Point

What you'll see ▶ Yourself in vertical free fall from 30 feet to a sand shelf at 60 where the undercut wall is a paint-splatter mural of encrusting sponges, tube sponges and coralline algae. **What you might see** ▶ Schooling grunts and foraging goatfish if you can take your eye off the wall and study the sand ridge.

CAYOS COCHINOS The Gardens

What you'll see ▶ A 300-yard, oval-

shaped seamount that explodes with hard and soft corals, swarms of juvenile fish and lots of tiny, colorful marine life, blue bell tunicates, flamingo tongue snails and giant anemones. The action starts in 35 feet of water and drops to 130, but the best zone of life is found at 80 to 90 feet.

What you might see ▶ Big barracuda and solitary grouper.

Lions Head

What you'll see ▶ A maze of large coral heads in a protected cove where you'll find every tiny tropical in the book—and then some. Look for butterflyfish, angelfish, barracuda, clouds of juvenile grunts, and a variety of damselfish, to name just a few. **What you might see** ▶

Whitenosed pipefish—if you know where to look.

Stadium

What you'll see ▶ Bleachers of star, brain, lettuce leaf and mustard hill corals rising to the surface from this 30-foot sand basin. Sea fans do the wave while large crabs, juvenile reef fish and schools of blue tang cheer divers on. At one end zone, swim through the locker room tunnels filled with frantic silversides and glassy sweepers. **What you might see** ▶

Mariposa Banks

What you'll see ▶ Three seamounts that rise to 35 feet. The tops are crisscrossed with sand channels that are virtual grocery aisles stocked with yellowtail damsel, indigo hamlet and—today's special—whitespotted filefish, two-for-one. The sides sprout with wire corals and gorgonians and vary from sheer drop-offs to sloping banks. **What you might see** ▶ Schools of jacks and the occasional turtle.

Sand Key

What you'll see ▶ Three different kinds of diving around a picturesque key of white sand and green palms. There are lush shallow reefs in as little as five feet of water and a small wall to 60 feet. If you know where to find it, there's also a solitary pinnacle that rises up from 90 feet sprouting wire corals and pink lumpy sponges. **What you might see** ▶ A beard of bushy black corals on the farthest, deepest side of the pinnacle.

Pelican Point

What you'll see ▶ A classic vertical wall dive from 15 to 100 feet with terraces of plate corals and lots of grouper, snapper, bar jacks and spotted drum. This site is a popular one for day boats and live-aboards visiting the island. **What you might see** ▶ Big dog snapper and free-swimming moray eels.

The walls are perforated with caves, overgrown canyons and swim-throughs that experienced divers enjoy worming their way through. Though there seem to be fewer fish here than at the other Bay Islands, on any given dive



you can spot anything from

cleaner shrimp, to snapper to spotted eagle rays. A channel cut through the island (parallel to the runway) allows easy access to either side so you can always find a lee to dive in. Operators tend to stick to "their" side but are willing to transit the channel to suit the weather or customer demands.

Accommodations

Dive resorts run the gamut from hillside bungalows to landscaped stucco villas.

Diversions

Pack a good pair of shoes and when you aren't going down, head for the hills. The hiking trails can be a bit steep and slippery, but the view from the top of the mountain ridge is worth it. At least take the guided hike to the waterfall—just remember your camera and the insect repellent. If you feel like staying at sea level, try snorkeling the shallow reefs, or take a kayak for a spin to a deserted beach. If that's still too much activity, there's always an open hammock.

For nightlife, a trip to Bonacca is a must. It's a gritty, dense, industrial town (most residents work in the fish-processing plants), but the locals like to party on weekend nights.

Utila

There are two kinds of divers to hang out with on Utila: Scruffy, European backpackers who—between training dives—enjoy comparing body piercings and tattoos; and globe-trotting nitrogen junkies who trade fish lists, photo tips and diving stories from far-flung islands.

The dichotomy came about like this: Years ago, word spread through Europe's



backpacking community that if you were anywhere close, Utila was the cheapest place in the islands to get certified. Backpackers came in droves, and much of Utila Town caters to these penny-pinchers with inexpensive lodging (one flophouse offers shelter for \$1 a night), bars, and more dive shops per mile than anywhere south of the Florida Keys. At press time, only two lodges cater to the experienced diver looking for the traditional dive/accommodations package.

What the two groups do have in common is an appreciation for some of the richest diving in the Bay Islands. Each site here will have you flipping through the Reef ID books, but don't be surprised if you don't find the fish or creature you're



looking for. Like Cayos Cochinos, Utila is famous for marine life that has yet to be identified and named.

Life in Utila is very different from the other Bay Islands. Settled by European pirates and sea dogs, the history of Utila is reflected in the colonial buildings and the curious lilting English and sailor's verbal

shorthand used by modern descendants. Utila is also the only major Bay Island that's almost totally flat.

The Diving ▶

Utila has the most diving options among the Bay Islands, with fringing reefs and walls on the north and south shores, a string of small cays and submerged seamounts. Marine life ranges from tiny blue bell tunicates to the whale sharks frequently sighted feeding in the waters off Utila.

Reefs along the southern shore start in 15 to 20 feet of water then gradually slope away to 200 feet, with mini-walls from 40 to 80 feet. Along the north shore, the platform reef falls steeply off the continental shelf, *(Continued on page 102)*

JONATHAN BIRD

ALTHOUGH LIFE IN THE BAY ISLANDS LEANS TOWARD THE EXTREMES—FROM UTILA'S WHALE SHARKS TO THE TUNICATES OF CAYOS COCHINOS—BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING. HERE, A HAWKSBILL TURTLE CRUISES THE SHALLOWS.



BAY ISLANDS ADVERTISER DIRECTORY

Operators & Resorts

Anthony's Key Resort (Sandy Bay, Roatan)

(800) 227-3483, (305) 666-1997, (011) 504-45-1003 • e-mail: akr@gate.net • web: www.anthonys-key.com • A dedicated dive resort, Anthony's Key offers unique and exciting activities above and below the water. Scuba diving available on Roatan's numerous lovely sites and to remote locations such as Cayos Cochinos. Scuba dive or snorkel with friendly dolphins. Horseback riding, windsurfing, kayaking, canoeing and nature hiking. Accommodations are in one of the resort's 56 comfortable wooden cabanas nestled among lush tropical greenery. Full-service dive shop, photo shop, gift shops and restaurant on premises. Educational programs for student groups and children's summer camps available on premises at the Roatan Institute of Marine Sciences. Call Bahia Tours.

Bay Islands Beach Resort (Roatan)

(800) 4-ROATAN, (011) 504-45-1425 • e-mail: deepted@aol.com • web: www.bibr.com • Full-service dive resort. A former private estate with main house on hill and bungalows on natural sandy beach. Specializes in personalized service. Bed and breakfast-type atmosphere. Great staff, very friendly. Beautiful property. 12 rooms. 8-day, 7-night package for divers, \$725 plus tax; \$650 plus tax for nondivers.

Bayman Bay Club (Guanaja)

(800) 524-1823, (954) 572-1902 • e-mail: info@baymanbayclub.com • web: www.baymanbayclub.com • Seclusion and romance! Location on lee side of island provides for calm seas, spectacular sunsets and beautiful view of distant islands. All cottages have ocean view, private veranda and hammock. 18 rooms. \$95 to \$115 nightly in nondiver package; \$625 low season to \$899 high season in diver package.

Casa Romeo's Hotel (French Harbour, Roatan)

(011) 504-45-5518, (011) 504-45-5853 • Hotel, bar, diving, restaurant and marina.

CoCo View Resort (Roatan)

(800) 282-8932, (352) 588-4132 • e-mail: info@roatan.com • web: www.roatan.com • Combines superb shore and boat diving, tropical atmosphere and comfortable accommodations. 25 rooms. 7-night dive package, \$699 to \$850 per person.

Fantasy Island Beach Resort (Roatan)

(800) 676-2826, (813) 353-9511 • web: www.empg.com/Fantasy-Island • The only fully air-conditioned resort on the island. 80 rooms on a private key facing the reef. Dive sites within five to 15 minutes by boat. Dive plans include all meals and over 20 tanks for a week of diving. Rates from \$675 to \$875 per person, dbl. occ. Transfers from airport and gratuities are prepaid. The package is the best value on Roatan this summer and fall. Consider light rain during October and November, visibility not affected (ranges from 80 to 110 feet year-round). The best of Roatan!

Laguna Beach Resort (Utila)

(800) 668-8452, (318) 893-0013 • e-mail: awhite@utila.com • web: www.utila.com • Bungalow-style air-conditioned accommodations. 10 rooms. Great access to shore diving on beautiful fringing coral reef. Personalized service by our committed staff for a memorable visit to our hot new destination. Totally self-contained. Vacation package week, \$645; dive package week, \$795. Daily rates available.

Posada Del Sol (Guanaja)

(800) 642-3483, (561) 624-3483 • e-mail: posadadel@aol.com • web: www.posadadelsol.com • Exclusive 23-room Spanish villa resort on the trade winds side of the island, within minutes of the world's second longest barrier reef. First-class diving, sea kayaking, snorkeling, fishing and mountain hiking. Lighted tennis court, gym and freshwater pool. Excellent food and service. 7 nights, 6 days, 3 boat dives daily, 3 meals daily, unlimited shore diving, beach picnic and sunset rum punch cruise, \$900, per person.

Reef House Resort

(Oakridge Harbour, Roatan)

(800) 328-8897, (210) 681-2888 • web: www.ScubaTimes.com/ads/travel/reefhous.html • A comfortable, secluded resort offering a coral wall dive accessible from the shore, day or night. Windsurfing and sea kayaking. 14 plantation-style rooms, with queen-size beds and ceiling fans. Fresh seafood, tropical fruit and island favorites served in dining facilities. Two boat dives daily to different sites on two boats. Full-service dive shop. Seven nights, all meals, two boat dives daily, one night dive, unlimited shore diving, weights and air, \$725 per person, dbl. occ.; nondiver, \$550. Children welcome.

Utila Lodge (Utila)

(800) 282-8932, (352) 588-4132 • e-mail: info@roatan.com • web: www.roatan.com • A centrally located, rustic and stilted seaside setting, with 8 bright and spacious air-conditioned rooms. More remote and adventurous diving on the southern end of the longest reef in the Western Hemisphere. Seamounts, rare tunicates and whale shark encounters. 7-night dive package, \$675 plus 7 percent tax per person.

Live-aboards

Bay Islands Aggressor III

(800) 348-2628, (504) 385-2628 • e-mail: divboat@aol.com or divboat@compuserve.com • web: www.aggressor.com • 110 feet long, 18 passengers in 8 air-conditioned private cabins. Nitrox and rebreather, hot tub, E-6 processing. Unlimited diving. Voted #1 live-aboard crew in the Caribbean by Rodale's reader survey. 7-day charter, \$1,195, all-inclusive.

Wind Dancer/Peter Hughes Diving

(800) 9-DANCER, (305) 669-9391 • e-mail: dancer@peterhughes.com • web: www.peterhughes.com • 120 feet long, 20 passengers in 10 cabins. Offers quality of service and spacious accommodations, all with en suite

facilities. 7 nights accommodations, 5½ days diving, airport transfers, meals, snacks, alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, up to 5 dives daily, tanks and weights, final night dinner at local restaurant, from \$1,195 per person, dbl. occ. Special 20 percent discount weeks.

Dive Travel Specialists

BZ Travel Services

(800) 382-7776, (281) 337-3758 • e-mail: bztravel@compassnet.com • web: www.compassnet.com/bztravel • 20 years experience in Central America. We offer knowledgeable dive travel information because we are experienced divers. We can arrange a complete travel package with airfare from any city. Discount airfare available from Houston or New Orleans directly to Roatan on TACA Airlines. Our friendly staff can work with your diving level and interest. Ask about our special group packages for 12 or more divers.

Experience the Adventure Tours

(800) 815-5019, (305) 267-6644 • e-mail: etatours@aol.com • Special promotions, discounted airfares, dive the reef, walls and wrecks, trips to waterfalls, river rafting, Mayan ruins and snorkeling.

Maya Tours

(800) 392-6292, (561) 477-4848 • e-mail: info@mayatour.com • web: www.mayatour.com • Best rates in the Bay Islands. Bulk air from most cities in the U.S. Specializes in "Dive and Explore" packages combining great diving with mainland tours to Mayan ruins, mountain rain forests and La Moskitia. For divers and nondivers who want to be secluded on West Bay beach, we have a two-room beach house for \$90 per day, and a one-room cabana with breakfast for 2 for \$59.

Roatan Charter

(800) 282-8932, (352) 588-4132 • e-mail: info@roatan.com • Honduras dive and travel specialist since 1981. Walls, wrecks, reefs and unlimited diving right outside the resort. 7 nights accommodations, transfers, meals and diving, \$699 plus 7 percent tax per person.

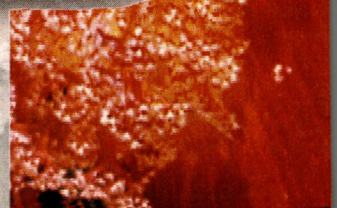
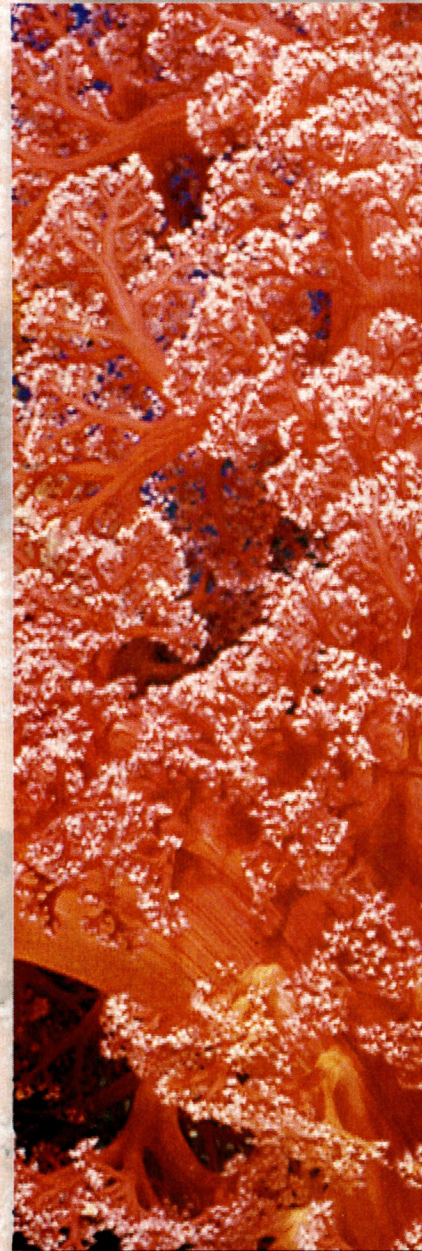
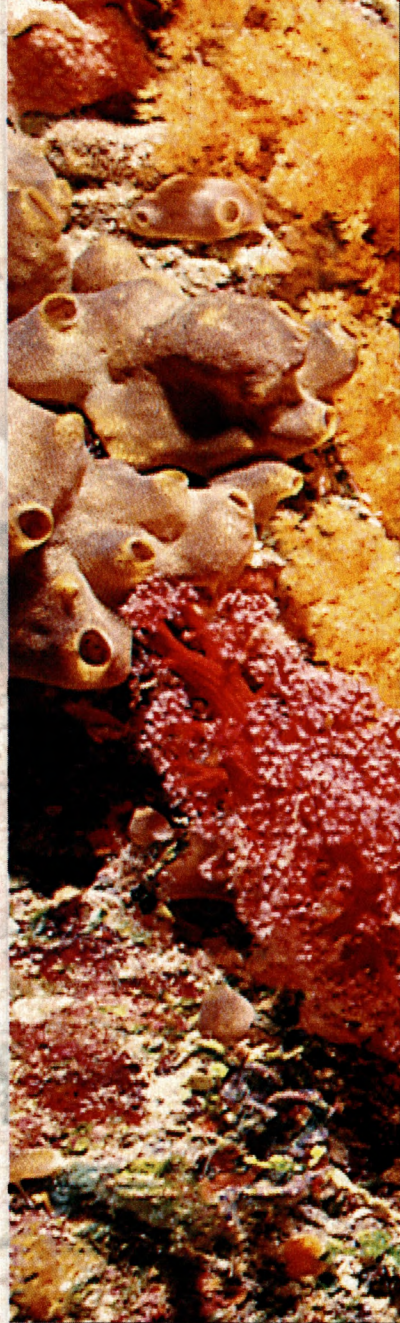
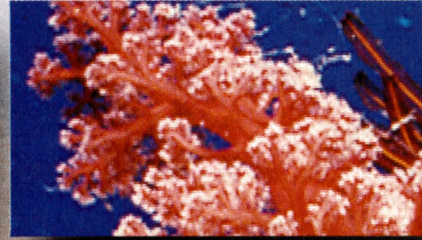
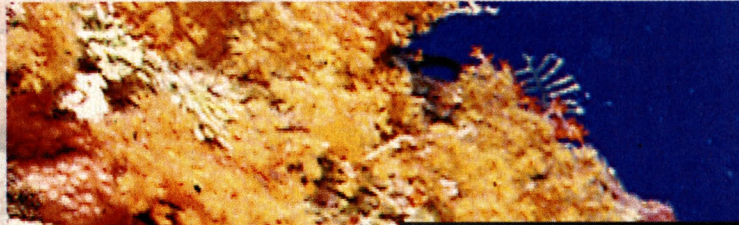
Scuba Travel Ventures

(800) 298-9009, (619) 291-9085 • e-mail: stvdive@aol.com • web: www.planetscuba.com/travelventures • Nobody knows the Bay Islands like we do. We are travel professionals who are also dive professionals. In fact, we owned and operated an international dive center. We have all ranges of accommodations, economical airfares and excellent quality dive packages. Call us today for more information.

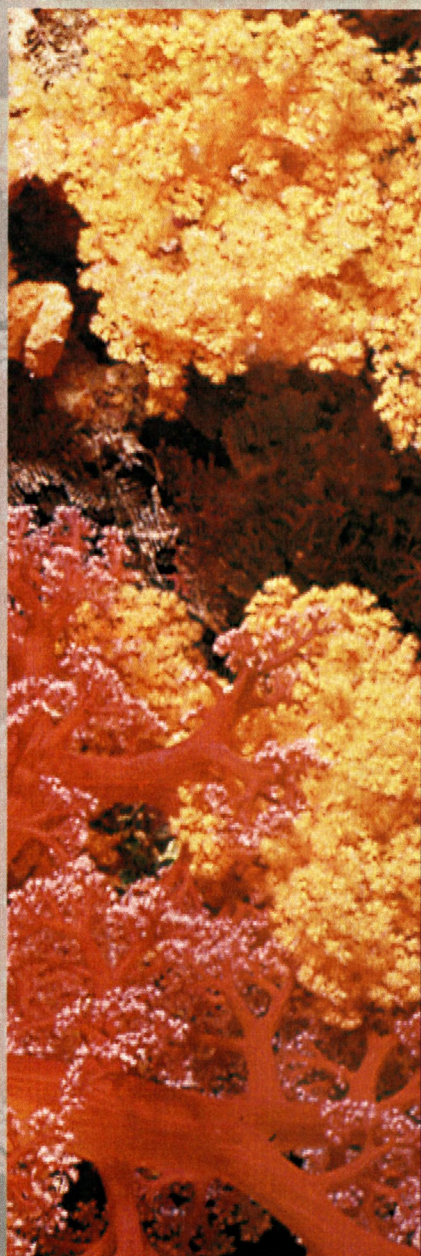
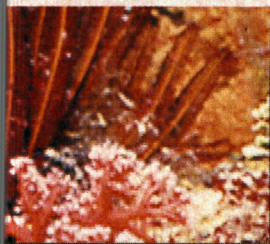
Tropical Adventures Travel

(800) 723-5814 • e-mail: dive@divetropical.com • web: www.divetropical.com • Selected by Rodale's Scuba Diving's readers as North America's favorite dive travel specialist. Representing the Bay Islands' best diving resorts at the best value, including discount airfare. As the largest dive wholesaler with over 23 years experience, Tropical Adventures is uniquely qualified to arrange your Bay Islands dive vacation. One call does it all!

Searching for an unchanged **SOUTH PACIFIC**, our field editors found a



place where ancient rituals and soft corals are the only current events.



An RSD Travel Guide

As divers, we leave landlubbers and the day-to-day behind when we enter the silent world, and we leave the well-beaten tracks to the track-beaters. Beyond the ordinary lies Fiji, where the righteous walk unscathed across hot embers, hereditary chiefs have authority to appoint presidents, and visitors are treated as honored guests by people formerly known for eating—not greeting—strangers.

For divers itching to jump the big puddle of the Pacific, Fiji—nicknamed the “soft coral capital of the world”—is easier to get to than Palau, less expensive than Papua New Guinea and not nearly as developed as Hawaii.

In fact, our readers so love the place that they rated it third best destination in the Indo-Pacific region for its walls, fourth for its fish life, health of marine environment and photography, and fifth for advanced diving,

BY KAREN & SAM SHELANSKI

value and overall destination. ➡

VITI LEVU

Fiji's international airport is located near the town of Nadi (NAHN-dee), on the western side of Viti Levu, Fiji's largest island. The Nadi area is home to several large Western-style resorts and golf courses. It is also home to the country's only McDonald's, and perhaps the only place in Fiji where you'll be hard-pressed to feel the local culture.

Venture beyond the tarmac and neon. The scenic Queens Road south from Nadi leads along Coral Coast, so named because of the nearby fringing reef, past the Beqa (BEN-gah) Lagoon, and into the capital city of Suva.

Suva is the largest and most cosmopolitan city in the South Pacific, and the only place in Fiji where you'll see a building taller than a palm tree. But it doesn't lack for charm and culture. In this multiracial city you'll see men from police to politicians wearing traditional Fijian sulus, or skirts, Indian women in graceful saris and ex-pats in T-shirts and shorts.

There is great souvenir shopping here, a wonderful municipal produce market, and on the outskirts of town, a rain forest ideal for a day's hiking. Suva boasts outstanding restaurants offering Indian, Swiss, French and Korean cooking, and it's the only place in Fiji where the nightlife gets any wilder than a cup of kava at a lovo feast.

The Diving ►

Like most of the world's urban areas, there's little diving in Suva itself. Head to the Coral Coast and Pacific

Harbour on Viti Levu's western side—about an hour's drive—or to one of the nearby islands.

Most day boats venture into Beqa Lagoon, the crater of an extinct volcano that measures nearly 10 miles across. Unfortunately, dive operators seem to frequent the same dozen or so dive sites, and their anchors have left their marks.

Nearby Diving ►

The Yasawa and Mamanuca Island groups offer the best diving on the north-western side of Viti Levu. Visibility can peak at 200 feet, and you'll find wonderful expanses of pristine hard corals in all colors and hues, but surprisingly few of the soft corals for which Fiji is famous.

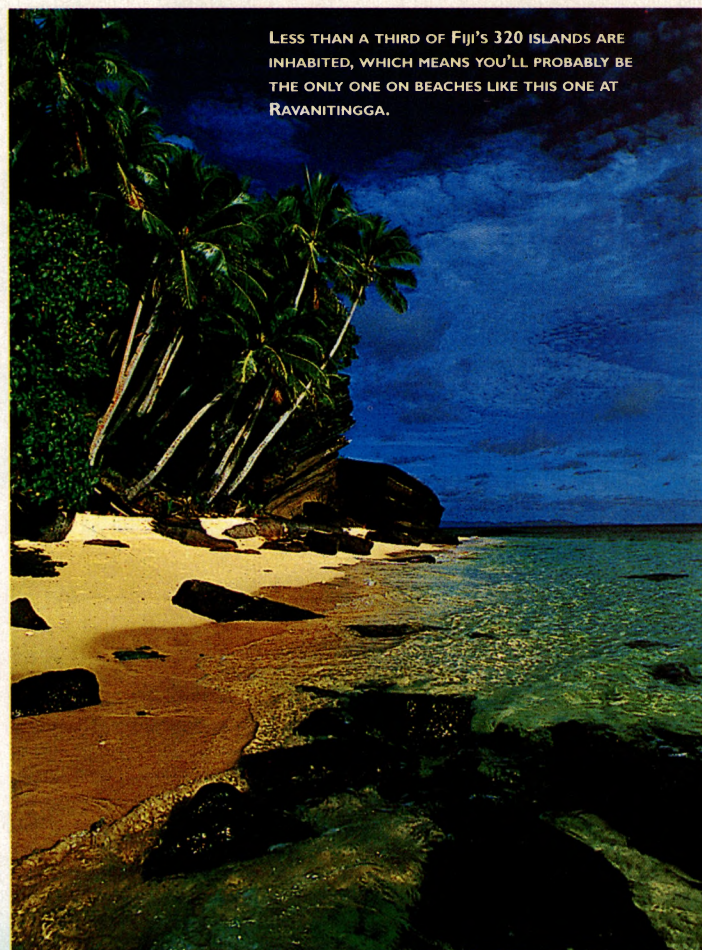
Fiji's fourth largest island, Kadavu (kahn-DAH-voo), lies 65 miles south of Viti Levu and was the site of Fiji's first commercial dive operation. Kadavu's early reputation was forged by the Astrolabe and Solo reefs,

although the Namalata and Tavuki reefs have also become very popular among divers. Here you'll find the Yellow Wall, a breathtaking soft coral garden.

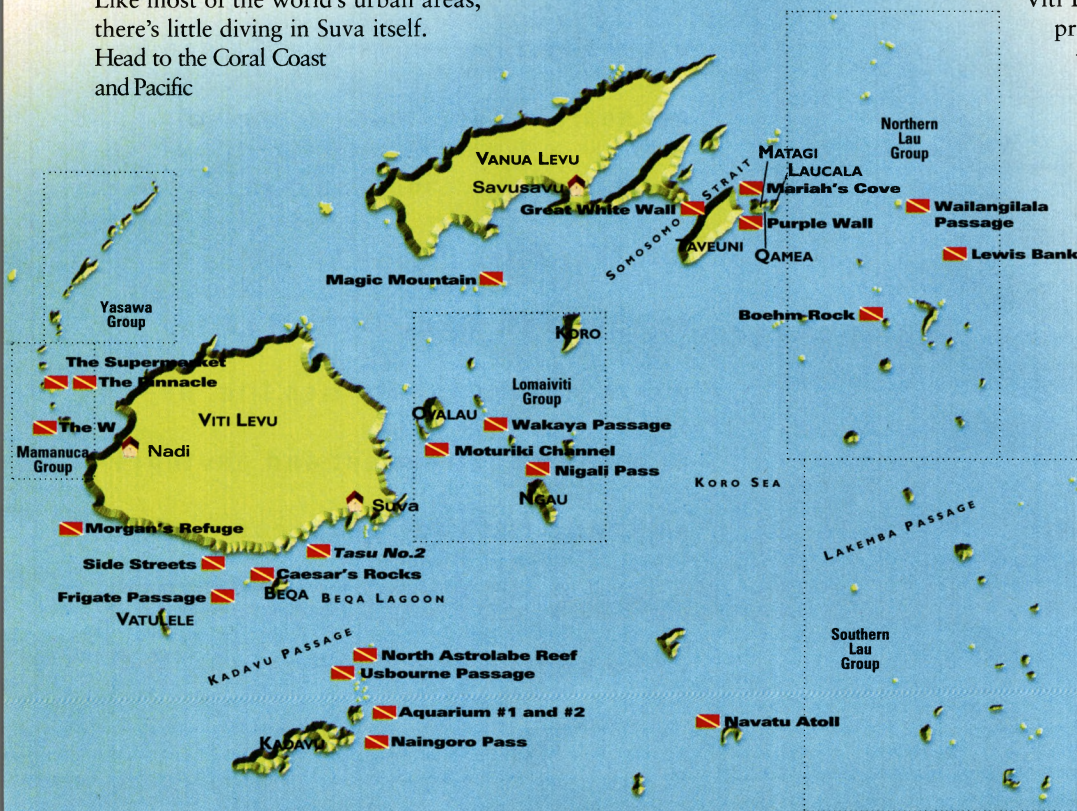
Vatulele, seven miles off the coast of Viti Levu, is noted for its sacred red prawns, and you don't even have to get wet to see them. They're found in a tidal pool at Korolamalama Cave near the rocky north coast, where their scarlet coloring is believed to come from oxidation in the limestone. Under water, you never know what you'll see, with sharks, rays and turtles among the myriad possibilities.

Accommodations ►

There's a wide range of accommodations on Viti Levu, from full-service dive resorts to hotels with convention centers to backpacker retreats. The area



LESS THAN A THIRD OF FIJI'S 320 ISLANDS ARE INHABITED, WHICH MEANS YOU'LL PROBABLY BE THE ONLY ONE ON BEACHES LIKE THIS ONE AT RAVANITONGA.





A FULL SPECTRUM OF COLOR AND LACK OF GREAT WHITES BEGS THE QUESTION, "WHAT'S IN A NAME?" BUT GREAT WHITE WALL WILL LEAVE NO DOUBT THAT FIJI IS THE UNDISPUTED SOFT CORAL CAPITAL OF THE WORLD.

DIVE IN



Location and Topography

About 1,750 miles northeast of Sydney, the 320 islands are sprinkled in a horseshoe formation over 80,000 square miles of Pacific, roughly the size of Utah. Its landmass, however, is only 7,000 square miles, about the size of Massachusetts. Most islands are mountainous and carpeted with lush vegetation, and less than a third are inhabited. Viti Levu ("Great Fiji") and Vanua Levu ("Great Land") contain more than 85 percent of Fiji's 750,000 residents and, along with Taveuni, make up 90 percent of its landmass. Another eight islands have at least 1,000 residents, but only four of those are larger than Manhattan.



Getting There and Around

Air Pacific—the national carrier—as well as Qantas and Air New Zealand, fly non-stop from Los Angeles to Fiji's international airport, located in Nadi, Viti Levu. The flight takes about 11 hours.

To hop around the islands, you'll likely fly a regularly scheduled flight on Sunflower Air or Air Fiji. The adventurous can charter a small plane for a reasonable price.



Documents

Residents of the United States and Canada will need a passport valid for more than three months from their date of entry. There is a departure tax of F\$20 on international flights.



Language and Customs

English is the official language and—along with Fijian—is widely spoken, and you may encounter pockets of Hindustani-speakers. In Fijian, *bula* is the universal greeting, while *vinaka* means "thank you."

Many men wear *sulus*, or wrap-around skirts. Fijians are a modest people, and outside the resorts, you should avoid wearing anything too revealing.



Dive Operators

There are about 60 dive operators in Fiji, many based at all-inclusive island resorts. You might find this to be a good deal when you price out day trips at the dive shops in the main cities, as some cost about F\$80 to F\$110 for a two-tank dive.



Climate

Situated 17 degrees south of the equator, Fiji's winter runs from June through October, the ideal time to visit. This season is drier, cooler and far less humid than the rest of the year. Winter is also the season when underwater visibility is optimum.

In the rainy summer months, December through March, the average high and low temperatures are 86F and 73F, while the water temperature can climb to the low 80Fs. In the winter, the air temperature averages 73F for a high and 68F for a low, while water temperatures around 75F will mean you'll need a wetsuit at least 3 mm thick, with many divers wearing 5 mm-6 mm suits with hoods.



Money

The U.S. dollar trades at the equivalent of about F\$1.38 (Fijian dollar). Credit cards are accepted at the larger hotels and resorts. There are banks in all the towns, but it might not be possible to exchange traveler's checks on remote outer islands. A 10 percent Value Added Tax (VAT) is generally included in the quoted prices.

Tipping is not expected and is, in fact, discouraged at some resorts.



Health Concerns

Fiji is free of most tropical diseases and no inoculations are necessary. Tap water is generally safe to drink in all cities, resorts and urban areas. There is a hospital in Suva, as well as a recompression chamber.



Time

Fiji is 20 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, 17 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.



Electricity

Electricity is 240 volts, with three-pronged Australian-type outlets. Some resorts and live-aboards offer 110 voltage or provide converters.



For More Info

Contact the Fiji Visitors Bureau at (800) YEAFIJI. Check out the Fiji Bula Page on the Internet at: www.fijifvb.gov.fj/. For more information, plug into RSD's web site at www.scubadiving.com. For additional reading, check out Moon Publications' *Fiji Islands Handbook*, or the Lonely Planet's guide to Fiji.

is the only place in Fiji where you will find large Western-style chain hotels, such as the Sheraton and Travelodge.

Vanua Levu, Fiji's second-largest island, is largely undeveloped and has little infrastructure outside the rustic town of Savusavu. While this makes Vanua Levu a popular place to catch a glimpse of genuine Fijian life, explorers need to respect local customs—including obtaining permission from the local chief before entering his village's lands.

VANUA LEVU & TAVEUNI

Five miles east of Vanua Levu across the famed Somosomo Straits sits Taveuni, nicknamed the Garden Isle for its lush foliage and dense rain forest. With thundering waterfalls, black beaches, rain forest walks and some of the best bird-watching in Fiji, Taveuni is an ideal destination for divers and nondivers alike.

The Diving ►

These islands in northern Fiji specialize in land-based diving. Taveuni's Eco Divers, along with Jean-Michel Cousteau's Fiji Islands Resort, have buoyed nearly two dozen sites off the island to prevent anchor damage to the reefs.

Sites in the Somosomo Straits are wildly popular, accessible from both Vanua Levu and Taveuni. The swift, nutrient-rich currents that sweep through this narrow channel sustain vast gardens of soft corals and bring in the frequent pelagic visitor. Currents can also make this one of Fiji's more advanced destinations. Inexperienced divers should be aware that three- to four-knot currents are not unusual, and all divers are advised to bring some type of signaling device.

Rainbow Reef, which runs perpendicular to the Strait, boasts more than 20 dive sites. You could spend an entire week diving this reef without ever seeing the same section twice.

The Somosomo Straits are also home to the Great White Wall, one of Fiji's most famous dive sites. Found between 110 and 140 feet, the sheer wall is thickly carpeted with white soft corals. When the current's right and the corals are open and feeding, it's a truly awesome sight.

Somosomo may be legendary, but it's not alone. There are a multitude of dive sites to the north and east of Taveuni in the Tasman Straits and in the channels between the nearby islands of Matagi (*Ma-TAHN-gee*), Qamea and Laucala.

(Continued on page 84)

26 FIJI

FAVORITES

Caesar's Rocks

Location ► Beqa Lagoon, Viti Levu
Depth ► 20-60 feet **Current** ► Light to moderate **Skill Level** ► Novice
Access ► Land and live-aboard
Count on ► Ten coral heads honey-combed with tunnels and caves rising from Fiji's famed Beqa Lagoon. Sea fans, black coral and the trademark soft coral. Gobies, crabs, brittle stars and nudibranchs. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ► Batfish, turtles and rays.

Side Streets

Location ► Beqa Lagoon, Viti Levu
Depth ► 40-60 feet **Current** ► Light to moderate **Skill Level** ► Novice
Access ► Land and live-aboard
Count on ► Coral caverns, undercuts and overhangs. Sea fans in a rainbow of colors. Regal angelfish, blue ribbon eels, lionfish and butterflyfish. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ► Red coral trout and whitetip reef sharks.

Frigate Passage

Location ► Beqa Lagoon, Viti Levu
Depth ► 40-120 feet **Current** ► Moderate to heavy **Skill Level** ► Advanced
Access ► Land and live-aboard
Count on ► Sea fans up to eight feet across. Colorful soft coral. Schools of jacks and baitfish. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ► Gray reef sharks.

Tasu No. 2

Location ► Beqa Lagoon, Viti Levu
Depth ► 75 feet **Current** ► Light
Skill Level ► Novice to intermediate
Access ► Land **Count on** ► A 200-ton Taiwanese fishing vessel intentionally sunk in September 1994. Soft and hard corals, and sea fans.

Morgan's Refuge

Location ► Coral Coast, Viti Levu
Depth ► 40-100 feet **Current** ► Light to moderate **Skill Level** ► Intermediate
Access ► Land **Count on** ► A giant Maori wrasse at 80 to 90 feet. Scarlet sea fans, flatworms, nudibranchs and starfish.

The W

Location ► Mamanuca Islands
Depth ► 40-100 feet **Current** ► Light
Skill Level ► Novice **Access** ► Land **Count on** ► Ledges and overhangs. Pink and purple soft corals. Grouper, lobster, hermit crabs, anemonefish, butterflyfish and



A FEATHER STAR CLINGS TO A CORAL HEAD FOR DEAR LIFE.

wrasses. In deeper water, mantas and dolphins. A great night dive. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ► Barracuda, jacks, mackerel, tuna and big pelagics. **Long shot** ► Whale sharks.

The Pinnacle

Location ► Mamanuca Islands
Depth ► 20-60 feet **Current** ► Light
Skill Level ► Novice **Access** ► Land **Count on** ► Bannerfish, butterflyfish, gorgonian fans, crinoids and hermit crabs. Sleeping parrotfish on night dives.

The Supermarket

Location ► Mamanuca Islands
Depth ► 30-50 feet **Current** ► Light
Skill Level ► Novice **Access** ► Land **Count on** ► Being encircled by a school of barracuda. Hard coral, the usual reef fish, barracuda, hawkfish and batfish. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ► Whitetip reef sharks and bronze whalers.

Naingoro Pass

Location ► Kadavu Islands/Astrolabe Reef
Depth ► 20-130 feet **Current** ► Light to moderate **Skill Level** ► Intermediate
Access ► Land and live-aboard
Count on ► A drift dive among red and purple soft corals, garden variety reef fish, nudibranchs and flatworms. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ► Tiger sharks, hammerheads and sailfish.

Usbourne Passage

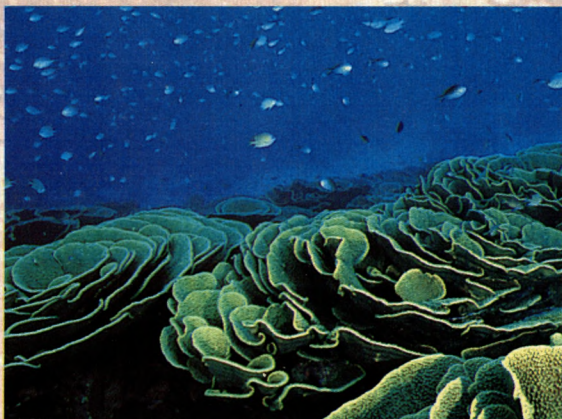
Location ► Kadavu Islands/Astrolabe Reef
Depth ► 20-100 feet **Current** ► Light
Skill Level ► Novice **Access** ► Live-aboard **Count on** ► Three pinnacles coming within 20 feet of the surface. Hard and soft corals. Unicornfish, anthias, basslets, wahoo, anemonefish, parrotfish and grouper. More than a dozen species of butterflyfish.

Aquarium #1 & #2

Location ► Kadavu Islands/Astrolabe Reef
Depth ► 10-60 feet **Current** ► None
Skill Level ► Novice **Access** ► Land and live-aboard **Count on** ► Small blue holes—180 feet wide and 130 feet deep—carved out of a strip of barrier reef. Staghorn coral, table coral, lettuce coral. A full spectrum of reef fish, including long-nose file fish, squirrel fish, saddled butterflyfish and lemonpeel angelfish. Schools of gill-raker mackerel. This site is only accessible during high tide.



A PHOTOGRAPHER DRAWS A BEAD ON AN IMMENSE SEA FAN AT USBOURNE PASSAGE.



DAMSELFISH BUZZ OVER CABBAGE CORAL LIKE FLIES AT A SALAD BAR.



SOFT CORALS AND SEA FANS ARE THE NORM AT BEQA LAGOON, BUT KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR BATFISH, TURTLES AND SHARKS.

North Astrolabe Reef

Location ▶ Kadavu Islands/Astrolabe Reef
Depth ▶ 30-90 feet **Current** ▶ Light
Skill Level ▶ Novice **Access** ▶ Live-aboard
Count on ▶ Huge reefs, massive walls and deep ravines. Tiera batfish, Maori wrasse, flame hawkfish, citrus gobies and canary blennies. Rainbow runners, yellowfin tuna and wahoo. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ▶ Humpback whales, mantas, hammerheads and white marlin.

Moturiki Channel

Location ▶ Lomaiviti Islands **Depth** ▶ 20-60 feet **Current** ▶ Light to moderate
Skill Level ▶ Intermediate **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ At least six species of nudibranch and three species of flatworm. Octopus, decorator crab, hermit crab and sponge crabs. Schooling anthias, cardinal fish and pipefish.

Wakaya Passage

Location ▶ Lomaiviti Islands **Depth** ▶ 40-130 feet **Current** ▶ Light to moderate
Skill Level ▶ Novice to advanced **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ A resident school of scalloped hammerhead sharks at the passage floor at 90 feet. A wall-top shingled with table and staghorn coral, its face brimming with sea fans and soft corals. Mantas, eagle rays, hawksbill turtles, jewfish, coronetfish, lionfish, gobies, prawn, anthias and blue fusiliers. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ▶ Bronze whalers at depths below 100 feet.

Great White Wall

Location ▶ Somosomo Strait **Depth** ▶ 40-130 feet **Current** ▶ Moderate to strong
Skill Level ▶ Intermediate **Access** ▶ Land and live-aboard **Count on** ▶ White soft corals covering the wall in depths from 75 to 220 feet. It's current-dependent, so if you dive it when it's slack, the corals will be closed and you'll be disappointed by the seemingly stark walls. At shallower depths, butterflyfish, scorpionfish, angelfish, parrotfish and lionfish. Purple blotched basslets at depths below 70 feet.

Purple Wall

Location ▶ Vanua Levu/Taveuni **Depth** ▶ 30-60 feet **Current** ▶ Light **Skill Level** ▶ Intermediate **Access** ▶ Land **Count on** ▶ A wall covered with an array of lavender soft corals. Moorish idols and pennant bannerfish. A six-foot moray and mantas.

Mariah's Cove

Location ▶ Vanua Levu/Taveuni **Depth** ▶ 35-80 feet **Current** ▶ Moderate
Skill Level ▶ Intermediate **Access** ▶ Land **Count on** ▶ Soft corals in a kaleidoscope of colors. Sea fans, huge schools of reef fish and occasional whitetip reef sharks.

Magic Mountain

Location ▶ Outer Islands **Depth** ▶ 10-120 feet **Current** ▶ Light **Skill Level** ▶ Novice **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ A coral pinnacle, 80 feet in diameter, rising from the bottom to within 10 feet of the surface. Even at the top, it's about 50 feet across. At about 40 feet, a soft coral- and sponge-covered tunnel pierces the "mountain." Flashlight fish can be found on night dives. Black coral, scarlet sea fans and soft corals. Orange anthias, basslets and purple baitfish. Trevally, coral trout, butterflyfish, golden damselfish, long-nosed hawkfish and spotted sweetlips. A resident school of batfish patrols the edge of the drop-off.

Nigali Pass

Location ▶ Outer Islands **Depth** ▶ 60-100 feet **Current** ▶ Strong **Skill Level** ▶ Intermediate to advanced **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ As the ebb tide flows out through Ngau's larger Northern passage, fresh seawater flows into the lagoon providing a thrilling three- to four-knot ride past schooling fish and sharks. Take the right-hand fork halfway through the passage and finish the dive in the shallows among lettuce corals teeming with juveniles. Expect sharks, jacks, tuna, barracuda, Napoleon wrasse and turtles.

North Save-A-Tack

Location ▶ Outer Islands **Depth** ▶ 40-130 feet **Current** ▶ Light to moderate
Skill Level ▶ Novice to intermediate **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ A series of spur-and-groove corals leading to a drop-off at about 120 feet. Visibility is tide-dependent, best dived on the incoming tide. A huge school of barracuda (300 to 500 fish) is frequently seen here. Whitetip sharks resting on the bottom, dogtooth tuna, sweetlips and schooling anthias.

E-6

Location ▶ Outer Islands **Depth** ▶ 30-130 feet **Current** ▶ Light **Skill Level** ▶ Beginner **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ A pinnacle rising from 3,000 feet of water in the middle of nowhere. A veritable magnet for sea life. Just about any type of fish in Fijian waters can be

found here. Sharks, rays and other big animals frequently seen. There is a resident whitetip in the "grotto" at 75 feet.

Trigger Rock

Location ▶ The Lau Group **Depth** ▶ 30-130 feet **Current** ▶ Light to moderate
Skill Level ▶ Intermediate **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ Another spectacular pinnacle rising from the seafloor. The bommie lacks the extraordinary density of life found on E-6, but is frequently visited by hammerheads. Schooling barracuda, batfish and turtles.

Boehm Rock

Location ▶ Northern Lau **Depth** ▶ 20-80 feet **Current** ▶ Light **Skill Level** ▶ Novice **Access** ▶ Land and live-aboard **Count on** ▶ Flashlight fish—with luminescent bacteria in pouches beneath their eyes—flitting about in the cracks and crevices of the undercut walls in the evening at depths below 40 feet. Latticed butterflyfish, anemonefish, hawkfish, sunburst basslets, wrasses and crinoids. Night divers also will see shrimp, lobster and decorator crabs.

Wailangilala Passage

Location ▶ Northern Lau **Depth** ▶ 60-110 feet **Current** ▶ Moderate to strong
Skill Level ▶ Advanced **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ Hundreds of small barracuda at 70 to 80 feet kept in tight formation by dogtooth tuna. Larger barracuda at 90 feet. Golden trevallies and African pompano. Reef fish include emperor angels, clown triggerfish, anemonefish and spotfin lionfish. **If you're lucky, you'll see** ▶ Whitetip reef sharks and bronze whalers, maybe even a whale shark.

Lewis Bank

Location ▶ Northern Lau **Depth** ▶ 60-90 feet **Current** ▶ Strong **Skill Level** ▶ Advanced **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ Visibility in excess of 150 feet. Lyretail grouper, huge tridacna clams, unicornfish and a dozen or more bronze whaler sharks.

Navatu Atoll

Location ▶ Southern Lau **Depth** ▶ 20-100 feet **Current** ▶ Moderate **Skill Level** ▶ Intermediate **Access** ▶ Live-aboard **Count on** ▶ A true atoll surrounded by miles of open ocean. A school of up to 300 barracuda, bronze whaler sharks, jewfish, trevallies and colorful tridacna clams.

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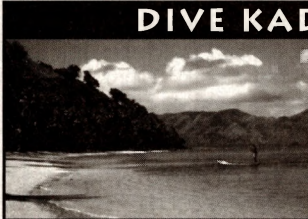
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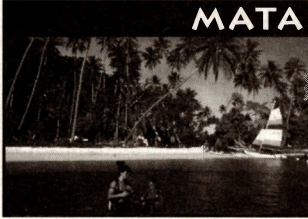
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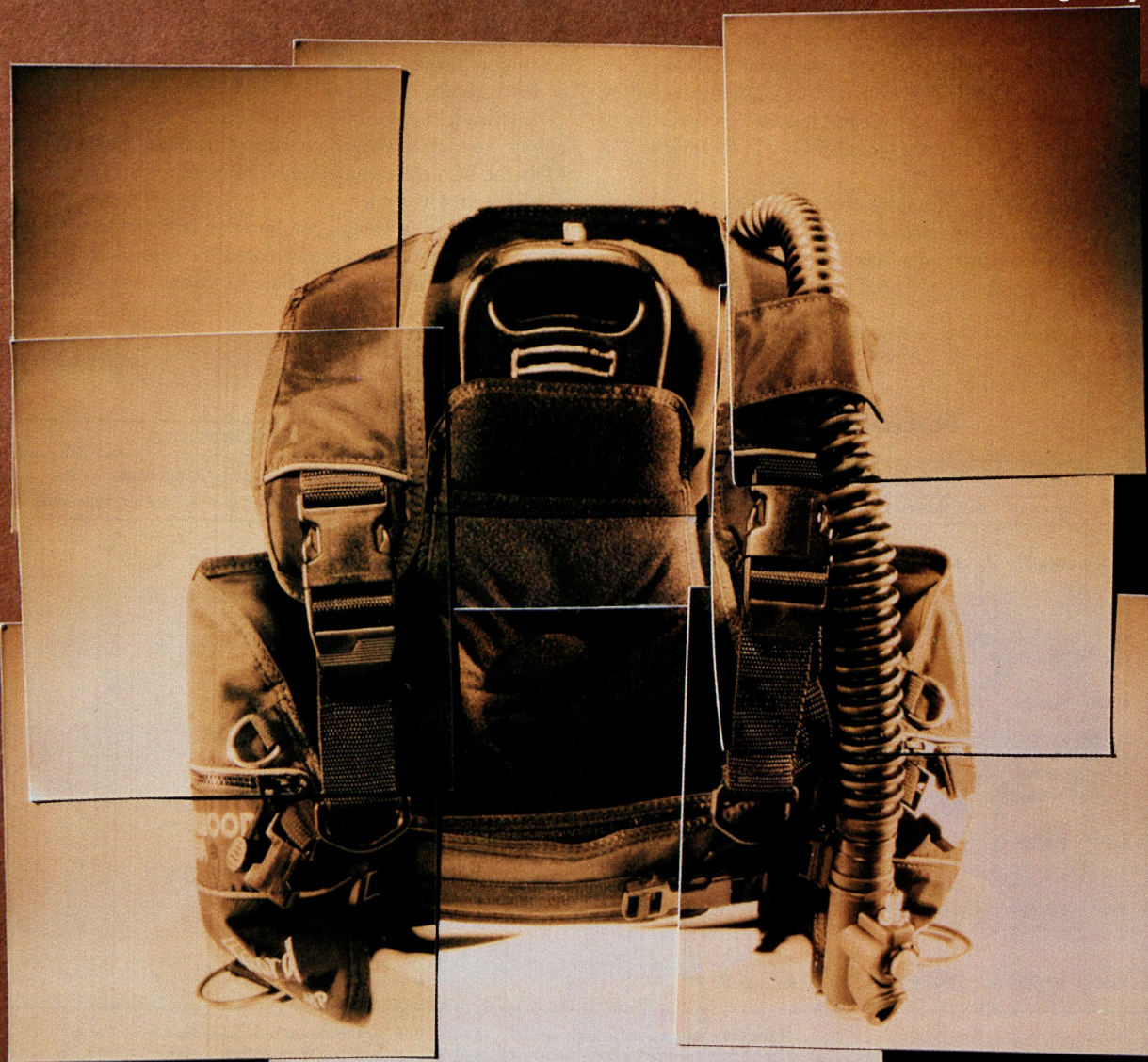
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CIRCLE NO. 48 ON READER SERVICE CARD

An RSD Gear Review

Seven *Best* JACKET- STYLE BCs

If you're looking for an all-purpose jacket-style BC, we've got your



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK LAWRENCE

number—the seven best models our testers could find. by JON HARDY

GONE ARE THE DAYS of fighting to get down, struggling to get up and finning constantly to maintain position. The buoyancy compensator (BC) has made continuous buoyancy control possible, along with providing surface resting to prevent accidents and positive buoyancy during rescues. All you have to do is to find one that:

- **Fits.** As ScubaLab testing has repeatedly shown, if a BC does not fit you properly, it may not function as intended or function safely.
- **Has appropriate lift.** Too much can be as bad as too little (see "How Much Buoyant Lift Do You Really Need?" page 64).
- **Works as advertised.** Only objective, scientific testing such as that conducted by ScubaLab can provide this information, not unqualified reports in other magazines and not personal opinions heard in dive stores or on the internet.

Cream of the Crop

Rather than present a confusing array of poor to excellent BCs, we focused this month's review only on the best jacket BCs we could find. These are BCs that can be used in temperate or tropical waters, with or without exposure suit protection. You will not find low-lift or so-called traveling or tropical BCs (see *RSD*, Sept./Oct. '95, for a review of these); tech or wannabe-tech BCs; or back buoyancy BCs (see *RSD*, Sept./Oct. '96, for a review of these). Weight-integrated and women's BCs will be reviewed in the next two issues.

In the meantime, here is the cream of the crop when it comes to general-purpose, jacket-style BCs. The seven models featured here survived our initial screening process during which we reviewed all of our past ScubaLab tests of more than 100

models of BCs, all the available catalogs of manufacturers who list BCs, and all the BC offerings at the 1997 DEMA trade show. We eliminated BCs that performed poorly in past tests and those with out-of-date designs. Then we asked manufacturers for the 20 BCs that survived this initial culling and tested the hell out of them. These seven came out on top.

How We Tested—ERGONOMICS

Sizing, fit and comfort were checked both in and out of the water. Assembly and adjustment were also scored wet and dry, and done without the instructions. Even though we believe all BCs should be provided with clear and complete owner's manuals (we also evaluated these), a BC's operation and adjustments should be self-evident to a certified diver. Why? Because the odds of you having the manual with you on your dive vacation are remote. Attachments and pockets were also tested in and out of the water for their usefulness and accessibility.

Attitude and stability were scored during an underwater swim with each test diver answering these questions:

- Did the BC help you maintain optimum underwater position?
- Did the tank wobble?
- Did the BC-tank-weight combination tend to turn you over?

Next, each valve was evaluated for ease of access and use, including both inflate and deflate functions. Ascent control was

Seven Best Jacket-Style BCs

		FEATURES					PERFORMANCE										TOTAL SCORE
							MECHANICAL			ERGONOMIC							
		Backpack Hard or Soft	Carrying Handle Hard, Soft, None	No. of colors	No. of sizes	Buoyant Lift Range	Valve Flow Rate	Air Trapping	Owner's Manual	Sizing, Fit & Comfort	Assembly & Adjust	Attitude & Stability	Attachments & Pockets	Valve Operation	Ascent Controls		
\$	DACOR Nautica (847) 446-9555	\$395	SOFT	NONE	5	6	22 TO 42	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	15
	SCUBAPRO Classic (800) GO-SCUBA	\$579	HARD	HARD	4	6	22 TO 66	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	11
	SEA FORM 200S (619) 562-3681	\$289	HARD	HARD	4	5	12 TO 35	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	10
	SEA QUEST ADV Spectrum 3 (619) 438-1101	\$400	HARD	HARD	4	7	18 TO 45	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
	SHERWOOD Accord (716) 283-2270	\$465	HARD	HARD	3	5	12 TO 35	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9
	SUB GEAR Sub Pro (619) 562-3681	\$359	HARD	HARD	4	6	17 TO 37	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	1	13
	U.S. DIVERS Cousteau (714) 540-8010	\$550	HARD	SOFT	3	4	29 TO 50	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	14

UNDERSTANDING THE CHART

and carry a scuba unit while soft handles are most often only suitable to hang the BC. The color of a BC is more than a fashion statement; it can make you more visible to your buddy or boats. The greater the number of sizes available the greater the odds of you finding a

Hard backpacks provide more stability and vertical adjustment than soft packs, but do not pack as easily. Hard carrying handles can be used to lift

best fit. Buoyant lift needs to be adequate for your diving and varies according to the BC's size.

SCORES

- 1 = Outstanding
- 2 = Excellent to Good
- 3 = Average

tested by fully inflating the BC at 10 meters (33 feet) and intentionally going into an out-of-control ascent. The distance the tester traveled before bringing the ascent under control using only the BC was used to score this test. Last was the test of surface floating position, performed as if the diver were ascending unconscious from a dive. Past and current BC evaluations have clearly shown the results of this test to be so inconsistent and so dependent on other factors that no score is given, but significant results are reported in the text.

How We Tested— MECHANICS

Mechanical tests were also performed at 10 meters. During these tests the flow rates of each inflate and deflate valve were tested repeatedly until results were consistent. Scores were based on the exhaust valve's ability to flow more air than the power inflator with the inflator button fully depressed. Air trapping was measured in the normal swimming position to determine how much air was left in the BC after using each of the valves. Final tests measured both total and inherent buoyant lift. These aspects of BC manufacture have so improved on these seven BCs (this may not be true on other BCs) that no scores are listed—all are outstanding. Manufacturers of these BCs have improved their quality control to the point that variation in buoyant lift at full inflation is at most only one or two pounds off the listed specs. Inherent buoyancy (how much buoyancy the BC has when empty) varies from less than one-half pound negative to less than one-half pound positive. This is a far cry from older or lower-quality BCs which can have as much as five pounds of inherent buoyancy, requiring the addition of this much weight to the diver.

How We Tested— THE TESTERS

BCs require far more subjective human testing than regulators or dive computers. That's why we used six evaluators (three men, three women) who followed the same test regimen and used the same scoring scale. Each tester's scores were supplemented by written comments. Test dives were performed in 10 meters of water with each tester using a BC listed as being the correct size for his or her body.

All scores of all testers were compiled and averaged to obtain female scores, male scores and overall totals. Unless stated otherwise, all scores on the chart and in the text are the overall scores of all testers for all tests.

BCs in Review

Any function or feature significantly better or worse than the average for these BCs is listed at the top of each review as a "thumbs-up" or "thumbs-down." No BC featured here is perfect, but when it comes to general-purpose, jacket-style BCs, these truly are the best of the best.

Dacor Nautica



Attachments and pockets;
valve flow rates



Assembly and adjustment

A Tester's Choice in past comparative evaluations, the Nautica is a well-designed BC that has stood the test of time. An unpretentious yet sound BC that is modestly priced, the Nautica performs with the best of them. It has an excellent generic inflator that is adjustable with an excellent quick disconnect on the low-pressure inflator hose. Adding to the Nautica's comfort are the depth-compensating waistband with free-floating depth-compensating overstraps, a soft pack and good padding. But there is a price to pay: the soft pack uses two tank bands, decreasing the available range of vertical tank adjustment and decreasing overall stability. There is a locator strap that can be used to hang the BC, but there is no other handle. The Nautica is also one of the very few BCs that comes Spare Air ready. Because many of Dacor's regulator low-pressure ports are one-half-inch, the BC hose comes with a one-half-inch adapter on a standard three-eighths-inch fitting so it can be mated to any regulator first stage.

The Dacor Extreme is a similar BC with many of the same features as the Nautica, but at a slightly higher price (\$430 versus \$395). The Extreme earned outstanding scores from male testers when we first tested it in 1995. It is offered in fewer sizes and colors, but provides an excellent complement to the Nautica for male divers if the sizing, fit or particular features of the Nautica are not suitable. The Extreme is not as well suited to female divers as the Nautica.



Dacor
Nautica

Scubapro Classic



Attachments and pockets;
assembly and adjustment



Valve operation and flow
rate; ascent control



Scubapro
Classic

"Classic" is not only the model name of this Scubapro BC, but also an excellent description of it. Today's Classic is the most recent version of a highly refined BC style introduced nearly 20 years ago as the stab (stabilizer) jacket, referring to the free exchange of air inside the single bag. The air cell is built of rugged materials that are neoprene-coated for proven durability. However, this construction makes the Classic heavier than most other BCs.

The Classic's tank band, the Super Cinch, is superior to every other BC tank attachment. We cannot understand why the other manufacturers do not copy this design, but continue to use complex bands that are difficult to thread and less secure.

The hard pack's curve helps seat the tank more easily and has a stowaway hard handle that slides out for use. It's an interesting idea, but the older fixed hard handle was easier to use.

The Classic's stab-jacket design has no shoulder releases or adjustments; therefore correct sizing is extremely important and is facilitated by six sizes including an XXS that is truly an extra-extra-small BC.

The primary remote exhaust on the Classic is positioned on the top of the right shoulder, rather than at the top of

the ambient (corrugated) hose on the left shoulder as is true of most BCs. This remote exhaust and the one at the right rear bottom of the BC both have extremely good flow rates. The new inflate/deflate is a good device but not as good as past Scubapro inflators. The buttons are harder to push and the inflate is more difficult to blow into orally. The oral deflate also has a slow flow rate. But the low-pressure hose quick disconnect is excellent and very easy to use.

Other nice touches: a wide free-floating strap over the waist and chest straps that stretch. Two small zippered pockets and two Velcro pockets that are better than most. The Classic also has the greatest buoyant lift capacity of all the BCs featured here. This is why the ascent scores are not as good as the other scores: more buoyant lift is harder to control.

Extended range divers, tech divers, dive leaders and other working divers should give the Classic strong consideration as a BC suitable for these demanding conditions. It may not have redundant inflators and air cells, but its lift capacity and durability make it well suited for extremely demanding diving. It clearly outperforms all wannabe tech

BCs and most of the so-called tech BCs.

The Classic also tended to float test divers on their backs more often than the other BCs tested here. In sum, the Classic is more rugged and better suited for demanding diving than any other BC featured here.

Sea Form 200S



Sizing, fit and comfort; valve flow rates; ascent control



Attachments and pockets

Sea Form is a new line of BCs offered by Soniform, which has been making BCs for other manufacturers for over two decades. The competitively priced Sea Form clearly shows the refinements of years of manufacturing BCs—this standard BC design is well executed.

The inflate/deflate is an excellent generic device, adjustable with an excellent quick disconnect on the low-pressure hose. Padding is good but comes off too easily. There is one free-floating overstrap and one fixed overstrap in addition to the waistband. The shoul-

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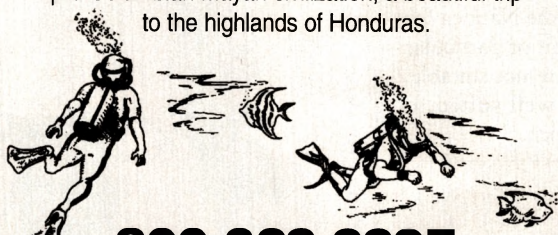
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Sea Quest
200S

Sea Quest ADV Spectrum 3



Sizing, fit, and comfort; assembly and adjustment; attitude and stability



Valve operation and flow rates

The entire Sea Quest Spectrum series has scored very well over years of equipment testing. This current Spectrum 3 shows continuing improvements. The shoulder adjustments and releases are of a new type that swivel as

der adjustments are somewhat stiff, making them more difficult to adjust.

The 200S is clearly better for men than for women. When selecting a 200S, be sure that the size that fits you has enough buoyant lift for your most demanding diving activities as these BCs have less buoyant lift than most of the others featured here.

well as adjust and release easily. The hard pack's traction plate adds to the ease of assembly and stability in the water. The two free-floating stretchable overstraps and a depth-compensating waistband help provide excellent comfort. The selection of seven different sizes makes fitting this BC a breeze. The

zipper pockets are also better than most.

Mechanically, the Sea Quest Trimline inflator/airway has improved, looks good and is best suited for warm water diving with no gloves. On the downside, it is still difficult to connect or disconnect from the low-pressure hose, and the power inflator can be



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accidentally pushed when using the shoulder remote exhaust. The stylized fins on the ambient hose serve no purpose and get in the way. And the oral inflate/deflate is also difficult to use and has a slow flow rate. ScubaLab still recommends the older Sea Quest Combo inflator/airway. It does not look as good, but costs the same and functions far better. We tested this Spectrum 3 with both of these inflators to confirm our past tests and recommendations. Sea Quest does have a new inflator on the drawing boards that is intended to combine the best features of the Trimline and the Combo.



How Much Buoyant Lift Do You Really Need?

This is perhaps the most difficult question concerning the selection of BCs. The key is to avoid the two extremes:

► **"MORE IS BETTER!"** Not when it comes to buoyant lift. Our ScubaLab tests have clearly shown that excess buoyant lift is difficult to control, particularly during ascents, and that the increased size and bulk of the BC add significantly to water resistance, requiring more energy to move through the water. Also, the greater the size of the BC's air cell, the greater the likelihood you will have difficulty with air trapping, sizing, fit comfort, attitude and stability under water.

► **"LESS IS MORE!"** This school thought contends you need only enough buoyant lift to hold your head above the water—12 to 15 pounds. Unfortunately, this isn't usu-

ally enough to compensate for a number of factors, including rough seas, wetsuit compression at depth or the need for reserve buoyancy in emergencies.

Take heart. There is a happy medium, and you can find it by following three simple rules of thumb:

Rule 1: On the surface. You need enough lift to float you with your maximum weights and a full tank, with no kicking or hand movements, head comfortably out of the water and the BC inflated less than halfway (which provides a reserve for rough water conditions or for emergencies).

Rule 2: At depth. Your BC's buoyant lift needs to be greater than the maximum weight you use plus the in-water weight of your full tank with a reserve for emergencies and the ability to adjust at depth due to

wetsuit compression.

Rule 3: In the store. Select a BC with adequate buoyant lift on the surface and at depth for the most demanding conditions you will encounter while wearing that BC.

EXAMPLE: If you use 24 pounds of weight and a full tank that weighs 6 pounds in the water, then your BC should have a buoyant lift in excess of this total of 30 pounds. Why more than 30? To avoid ever having to fully inflate your BC during normal use. BCs are more comfortable, restrict breathing less and cause less drag when they're only partly inflated.

EXAMPLE: If on the other hand you only need 4 pounds of weight with a full tank that weighs 4 pounds in the water, you would only need to exceed 8 pounds. As a practical matter, most BCs in the smallest available sizes have 12 or more pounds of buoyant lift.

Sherwood Accord



Attitude and stability; valve operation and flow rates



Attachments and pockets

The Sherwood Accord stole the show during this series of BC tests. This is a clean, sound BC that has most of the better design features incorporated into it, with none of the innovative problems that come with new designs. The newer style inflate/deflate works very well, along with an easy-to-use low-pressure hose disconnect. The hard pack enhances stability and is well padded. There is one free-floating overstrap at the waist. Attachments and pockets are not up to the quality

Dealer Prep

With a complex item of gear like a BC, dealer prep is extremely important. From helping you select the right BC for your needs to answering your questions after the sale to assisting with options or repairs, the professional dive store plays a key support role in the best use of your BC.

► During the shopping process make sure you inflate and deflate the BC several times and leave it inflated to test for slow leaks or missing parts. Adjust straps, buckles and cummerbunds; thread tank bands and make any one-time adjustments together with the dive store professional. Your dive store pro can also explain features, show accessories, install the power inflator and add the inflator quick disconnect hose to the regulator first stage at this time.

► Before leaving, make sure you have written and verbal instructions on your BC's use and an owner's manual with directions for care and maintenance. Don't overlook the warranty information, cautions or any special information on this BC.

► Ensure that the corrugated and the low-pressure hose are the proper length for you. Also be sure the connections for the inflator fits your system.

—JASON MANIX

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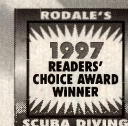
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of the rest of the design, but the zippers are good. Shoulder adjustments are excellent.

Like the Sea Form 200S, the Accord has a modest range of buoyant lift (12 to 35 pounds depending on size). So you need to be sure that the size that fits you has enough buoyant lift for your diving conditions.

Sub Gear Sub Pro



Attitude and stability; valve flow rate



Assembly and adjustment; attachments and pockets

Sub Gear is a new line of diving equipment offered by Soniform (see also Sea Form). The Sub Pro BC has a well-made hard pack with a good handle



Sub Gear Sub Pro



U.S. Divers Cousteau

that definitely adds to the stability of the Sub Pro during underwater swims. The shoulder adjustments are stiff and difficult to use; while the pockets are hard to open and keep open.

The valves have excellent flow

rates, but the oral inflate is hard on the mouth. The whole device is easy to grip, making the power inflator easy to use. The low-pressure hose quick disconnect is excellent. The Sub Pro is Spare Air ready for those divers who

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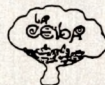
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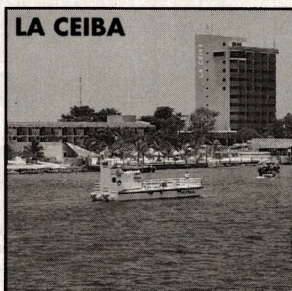
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Female Perspective

When testing low-lift BCs in mid-1995 we discovered such a great disparity between female and male scores (see *RSD*, Sept./Oct. '95) that scores were reported according to gender. In this report on higher-quality general-purpose BCs, the differences were not as great, but there are still clear and important distinctions for women to consider.

The only BC featured here to receive higher scores from the female testers than the male testers was the Cousteau. The Accord and Nautica had nearly equal scores from both men and women, while all the others—Classic, 200S, Spectrum 3, and Sub Pro—had clearly lower scores from female testers. The greatest differences in scoring were in sizing, fit and comfort. (*RSD*'s January '98 issue will focus on BCs made for women.)

wish to use this option. There is a free-floating overstrap on the waistband. Although the Sub Gear catalog indicates that the Sub Pro is well suited for female divers, the female test diver scores were poorer than the male test diver scores.

U.S. Divers Cousteau



Sizing, fit and comfort; assembly and adjustment; attachments and pockets



Attitude and stability; valve flow rates; air trapping; ascent control

The Cousteau is a sound BC that has been refined and distributed by U.S. Divers for a number of years. Progress by other BC manufacturers has tended to pass the Cousteau up, yet it still rates

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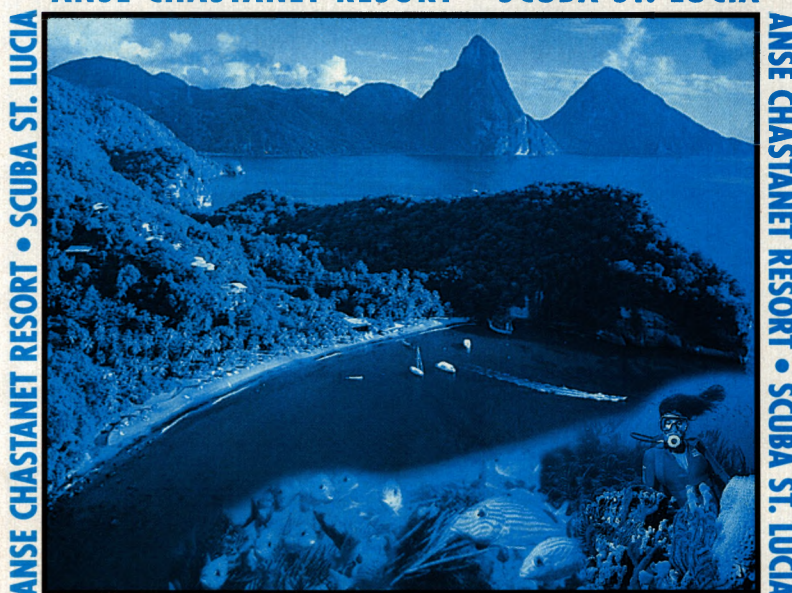
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CIRCLE NO. 33 ON READER SERVICE CARD

BCs and Diving Accidents

If you are selecting a BC for use in both temperate and tropical waters, you need to base your buoyant lift needs on temperate-water use. A contributing factor recently identified in diving accidents is the use of low-lift BCs intended for tropical diving, but used in temperate waters that require thick suits and heavy weights. In such a case, the diver does not have enough buoyant lift to become neutral at depth due to wetsuit compression, and therefore cannot make an effective controlled ascent. Remember: Select a BC with adequate buoyant lift for the most demanding conditions you will encounter while using that BC.

with this group of best BCs. The waistband is depth-compensating with an excellent and wide free-floating over-strap that creates good fit and comfort. The simple-to-use shoulder adjustments are also excellent. The pockets are simple and easy to open.

The inflate/deflate fits the hand well and is easy to use, but the oral deflate flow rate is slow and some air trapping does occur. Ascent control is hampered by valve flow rates and air trapping. The secondary remote exhaust is located on the left rear bottom rather than the right rear bottom as is true of all the other outstanding BCs in this group. The right-hand position is the best position for these valves as the left hand would be used for the inflate/deflate device on the end of the ambient hose.

The Cousteau has hard plastic wings on the backpack that are at waist level, covered and well padded. They do not improve fit, comfort or stability and make it harder to handle the BC and tank out of the water.

BC EVALUATORS

JON HARDY
JASON MANIX
CATHY MCBRIDE
LORRAINE SADLER
SHERRI WALKER
NEIL WYTHER

Jon Hardy is the director of RSD's ScubaLab.

Low-Vis Ability

Remember Murky's Law: what you can't see won't hurt you. These tips will keep you diving, even in the soup du jour. ► by JOHN FRANCIS, M.D. (mud diver)

Low vis: It's the life-giving soup from which most divers evolve. Chances are good that your first checkout dives were conducted in a murky pond, lake or river. It's ironic that we begin our passion for diving under some of the most challenging, frightening and disorienting conditions. It's time we rediscover our roots.

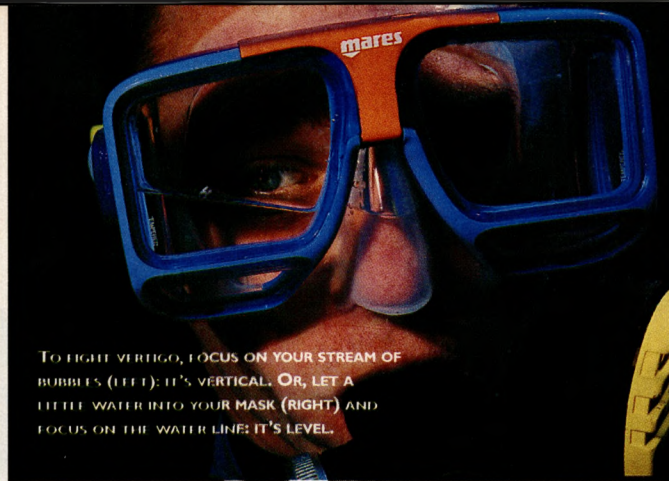
The cold, hard fact is that, like it or not, you will eventually find yourself diving in water that looks more like gumbo than gin. Sometimes it's unavoidable: that sludgy river is where the cool wreck is. Sometimes, we even *seek* low visibility: water that's loaded with nutrients is often dense with life, from filter-feeding anemones to meat-hunting pelagics. More often, low vis is the luck of the day's draw, but we tolerate it because we all know that a mediocre dive is better than none.

Gear Up

Nothing is more frustrating than not having the right tool for the job. This also goes for diving in lowered vis, and you need to carry the right equipment for the task at hand and rig it efficiently. You want to maximize your ability to navigate blind, and minimize your chance of snagging unseen lines and debris. Here's the wish list:

- **COMPASS.** Low visibility hides the visual cues that make seat-of-the-pants navigation possible. You may think you know where you're going, but if you can't see, you're probably lost—unless you have a compass and know how to use it.
- **LINE REEL.** In extreme conditions, a line laid out from the anchor line—like Little Red Riding Hood's trail of bread crumbs—can help you find your way home. A heavier line than you'd use for wreck penetration (say, quarter-inch) is easier to see in murky water, and stands up better to current and surge. If it's biodegradable rope, like sisal, you can use it as an ascent line in case you can't return to the anchor line: tie it to a rock and pay it out slowly as you ascend.
- **SURFACE SIGNALING DEVICES.** If your navigation skills fail, you may surface far from the dive boat and you'll want to attract the crew's attention. For a discussion of signaling devices, see "Gear Bag," March 1997.
- **BUDDY LINE.** To maintain buddy contact in the thickest soup, some divers hold the ends of a short rope. "Short" means three or four feet. A longer rope will snag on rocks, plants, your leg, other divers, whatever. Hold the rope, but don't tie it or clip it. Some divers prefer to just hold hands.
- **KNIVES AND SHEARS.** The risk of entanglement in fishing lines and nets is greater, obviously, when you can't see the stuff. Mount two sharp shears or knives on different parts of your body (a leg and shoulder, for example) so you





TO FIGHT VERIGO, FOCUS ON YOUR STREAM OF BUBBLES (LEFT): IT'S VERTICAL. OR, LET A LITTLE WATER INTO YOUR MASK (RIGHT) AND FOCUS ON THE WATER LINE: IT'S LEVEL.

can always reach one. Shears are ideal, as you can use them with one hand on fishing line and small rope.

► **LIGHTS.** Like headlights in fog, dive lights can sometimes help in murky water, sometimes hinder. Even if your light doesn't illuminate anything, it may make you more visible to your buddy. Carry no more than a medium-sized light you can stow in a BC pocket.

► **STREAMLINE YOUR GEAR.** Clip consoles and backup regulators close to your body where they won't snag. Don't use swinging gate clips, as they can inadvertently hook onto stray lines. Strap a knife to the inside of your leg. Don't encumber yourself with gear you're not going to use. Leave your camera behind, for example. Forget the big dive light.

► **HOMING DEVICE.** Ultrasonic locators, which allow you to home in on a pre-positioned transmitter (see "Gear Bag," April 1997), are now available. They're an expensive but effective way to find the anchor line or ascent/descent line again so you can make a controlled ascent and surface near the dive boat.

How Low is Low?

Everyone's idea of lousy vis is different, but all divers can agree on this: Low visibility is best defined as conditions in which special techniques and gear must be utilized to navigate, with a buddy, from an entry point to an underwater destination and back. It also depends upon your comfort level, location and expectations. You may pray for 25 feet of vis in that lake an hour from your house, but consider anything less than 100 feet disappointing during your once-a-year dive vacation to the Caribbean.

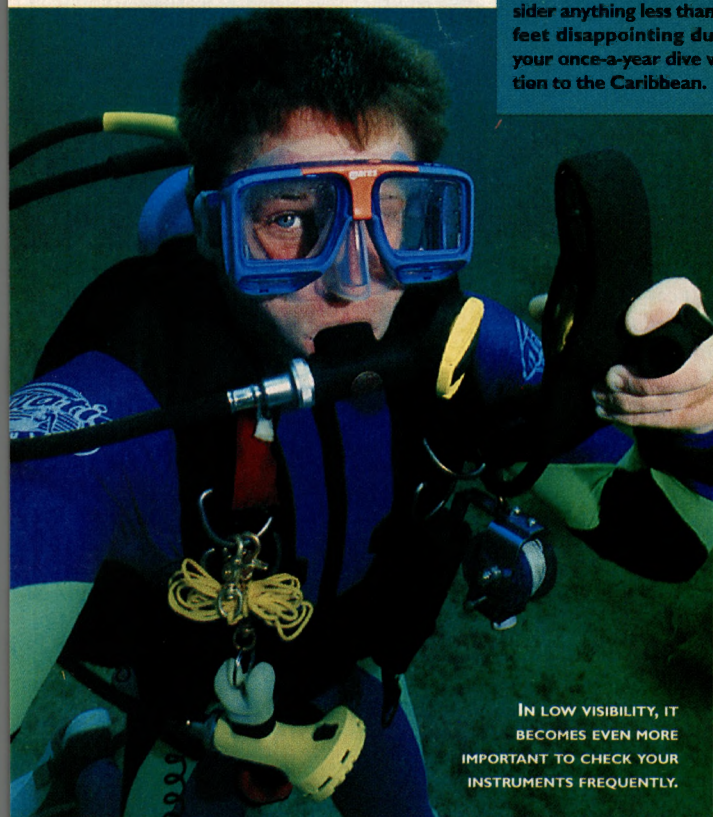
On Second Thought

The anchor is down and, although the dive master admits the visibility's not so

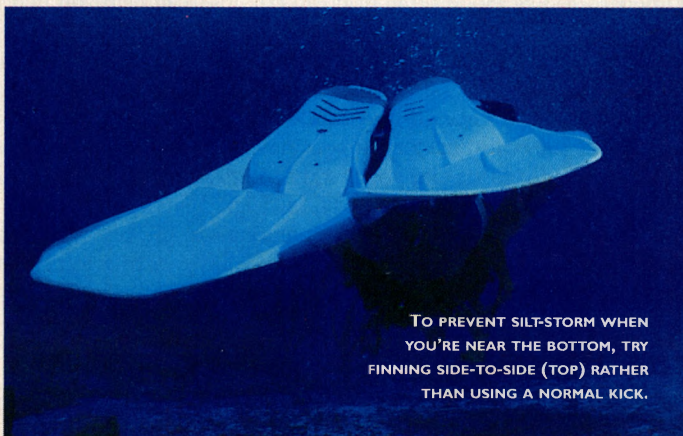
great today and there's a bit of a swell running, the crowd of divers is tumbling over the side. Peer pressure is strong at times like these, but don't be too quick to follow the lemmings. Take stock of the situation and ask yourself, do I really want to do this?

► **WHAT'S YOUR PURPOSE?** If your original goal was to take good photos, the plan's probably now obsolete. Do you want to dive anyway? If not, don't. Remember, you should only dive when you feel up to it.

► **WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE?** Remember that low vis and strong surge often go hand-in-hand, as when deep wave action stirs up bottom silt. Does being thrown violently against invisible rocks sound like fun? Other hazards, manageable by themselves, become more serious when you can't see. Is this site known for thick



IN LOW VISIBILITY, IT BECOMES EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TO CHECK YOUR INSTRUMENTS FREQUENTLY.



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kelp or seaweed? Strong currents? How deep is it? How experienced are you? How about your buddy? If it doesn't feel right, have the courage to say no.

► **PLAN THE DIVE.** If you and your buddy decide to dive, agree on a simple route, like out and back from the anchor line. Review what to do if you become separated (see "More Lowdown on Low Vis," page 72). Who's going to be the primary navigator and who's the sightseer? Consider trading roles halfway through the dive.

► **LOCATE AN ALTERNATE EXIT.** If you lose the dive boat and have to make an ascent without a reference line, you don't want to be in the path of boat traffic, or where swells are breaking on rock. Note a compass heading that's likely to take you away from surface hazards.

Into the Soup

In a weightless environment, visual cues are important to maintain your sense of balance and up/down orientation. The worse the visibility, the greater the risk of disorientation, vertigo, anxiety and, ultimately, panic. When diving in low vis, you should conserve what visual cues you have and use instruments to fill in the blanks.

► **USE THE ANCHOR LINE.** Or use an ascent/descent line to guide you and give

you a sense of stability as you descend and ascend.

► **DESCEND HEADS-UP.** You rely more on your inner ear's sense of up and down when you can't see much. Don't scramble that natural gyrocompass by turning yourself upside down.

► **DON'T HIT BOTTOM.** You're likely to stir up silt and make visibility even worse. Instead, stop a few feet above, but in sight of, the bottom.

► **PAUSE.** Near the bottom, hang on the anchor line, check your equipment again and re-evaluate the situation. Once your eyes have adapted to the dark, you may be able to see better than you expected. Try your light; does it help or hurt? And, by all means, don't shine it in your buddy's eyes. How's the current and the surge? Are conditions good enough to justify continuing with the dive? Now is the time for another go/no-go decision.

► **BE NEUTRAL.** Fine-tune your buoyancy before leaving the anchor line. If you have to kick to stay off the bottom, you'll stir up silt.

► **SET A COURSE.** Whether you follow a compass course or lay out a guideline or both depends on how much you can see. So does the route you follow. In the

IN THICK WATER, THE DIVE BOAT MAY BE INVISIBLE. WHEN LEAVING YOUR SAFETY STOP AT 15 FEET, REACH ONE HAND ABOVE YOUR HEAD.

worst conditions, a short, straight out-and-back route is probably best.

► **TRUST YOUR COMPASS.** If you think, "That can't be right, I've been going in a straight line," check that the compass is level and the card is swinging freely. If it is, believe your compass, not your instincts.

► **FIN GENTLY.** It can be hard to stay close

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enough to the bottom to see it, yet far enough from it not to stir up silt with your fins. But try. Fin side-to-side so you don't direct jets of water at the bottom. Or use the cave diver's posture: head slightly down, feet slightly up.

► **IN A SILT-STORM, FREEZE.** If you do kick up a cloud of silt, hang motionless and wait for it to settle.

► **WATCH YOUR INSTRUMENTS.** If you lose sight of the bottom, it will be easy to start drifting up without realizing it. If you're feeling some anxiety, you may use air faster than normal. Check your instruments frequently.

Out of the Ooze

On many dives, the most hazardous thing divers can do is ascend. The chance of a rapid or uncontrolled ascent is greater if you can't see, if you're feeling a little dizzy or if panic is creeping over the horizon.

► **START BACK EARLY.** Stuff happens, and is harder to deal with when you can't see. To figure in an air reserve for problems like an entanglement, start back to the anchor line sooner than you might in clearer water. In extreme conditions, the rule of thirds is probably a good one: use one third of your air for the outbound trip and another third to return to the sur-

face, keeping the other third just in case.

► **ASCEND ON LINE.** Low vis makes it harder to guess your ascent rate, and even slight anxiety can trigger the "get me outta here" response. Following the anchor line or ascent line up gives you a stable, reassuring reference.

► **IN OPEN WATER, DOUBLE UP.** If you can't find the anchor line and making an ascent line isn't an option, double your precautions. Hold your console and your BC inflator together in one hand and hold on to your buddy with the other. That way, each of you is monitoring the

level. Also, focus on your stream of bubbles: it's vertical.

• To make the most of a low-vis dive, settle in one spot and focus on the macro scale. There's a whole world of violence, greed, sex and beauty on a square yard of reef.

• If you lose your buddy, stop, listen and look. Turn a full circle while shining your light around. Your buddy may see yours or you may see his. If that doesn't work, search for

one minute in the direction where you saw him last. If that doesn't work, surface, make contact and resume your dive.

• If you get disoriented, pause a moment. Look at the water in your mask, the bubbles going up. Still having problems? Adjust your buoyancy so you're neutral. Then close your eyes and breathe easily. Your body will tend to assume a head-up posture by itself. After a few seconds, open your eyes, check your instru-

ascent rate for both. Keep an eye on your bubbles for another ascent rate indication and to maintain an "up" reference so you'll be less susceptible to vertigo.

► **DON'T HIT THE BOAT.** Normally you can rely on seeing the dive boat before you hit it, but in very thick water it may be invisible. When leaving your safety stop at 15 feet, reach one hand above your head.

► **WASH UP.** There's probably nothing harmful in silt and plankton, but when it dries, it can smell pretty bad. And it can't be doing you or your equipment any good. ☺



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Into Thin Air

Fasten your seatbelt and put your tray table in the upright and locked position. Here's the latest research on flying after diving.

► **by SAMUEL SHELANSKI, M.D.**

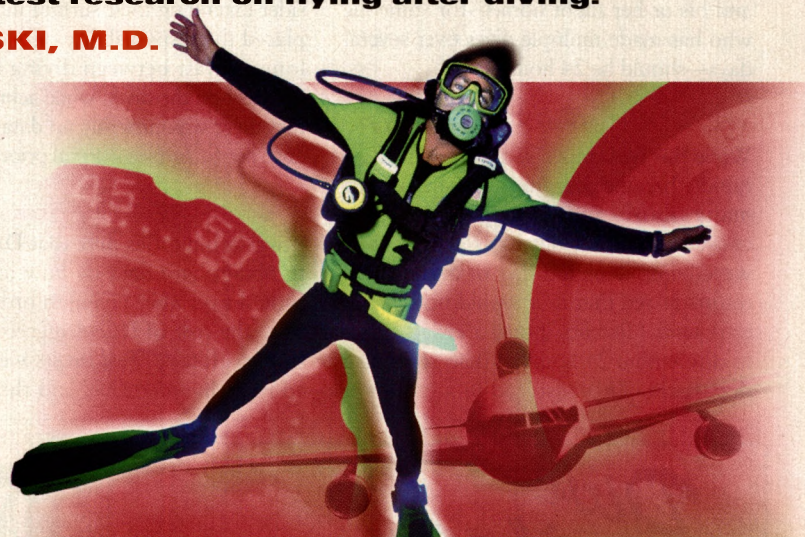
Have you ever wondered why you only get five-and-a-half days of diving in a seven-day dive package? Sure, everyone knows that you aren't supposed to dive before you fly, but how long are you supposed to wait? Is it 12 hours? 24 hours? The answer isn't clear-cut, but one thing is: It all depends on the kind of diving you've been doing and the amount of risk you're willing to take.

What's the Big Deal?

Flying after diving puts a diver at increased risk of decompression sickness (DCS) by decreasing the pressure to which the body is exposed. Remember that nitrogen dissolves in your blood and tissues during a dive and can bubble during ascent to the surface? Likewise, residual nitrogen dissolved in your body at sea level can also come out of solution on ascent in an airplane. The more nitrogen dissolved in your tissues, the more likely this is to happen, particularly as the result of diving.

But Aren't Airplane Cabins Pressurized?

Yes, they are. Federal Aviation Administration guidelines stipulate that commercial airline passengers not be exposed to altitudes greater than 8,000 feet. While there are rare exceptions to this rule—the airport in Quito, Ecuador, through which most divers pass on their way to and from the Galapagos, is at 9,200 feet—most modern airplanes actually expose passengers to atmospheres equivalent to an altitude of 5,000 to 7,000 feet. These altitudes correspond to a decrease in the pressure to which the body is exposed of close to 25 percent, equivalent in percentage change to an ascent from 99 to 66 feet. While this may not seem so significant, it is important to keep in mind that the body's tissues are saturated with nitrogen at sea level. And if you've been diving shortly before flying, residual nitrogen may still be leaching out of your tissues, a process that would be accelerated during flight and possibly causing symptoms of DCS.



How Long Must I Wait?

The answer to the question of how soon after diving a person can safely fly is still not definitively known. Twelve hours is accepted by most as being a safe interval for someone who has made a single dive, or a dive a day over several days. Therefore, the real debate concerns what constitutes an appropriate time-to-fly for a diver who has made multiple dives over multiple days, as is commonly done at many resorts and on live-aboard dive boats.

The original guideline of 12 hours has its origins in the military, and was supposed to represent a time after which the body was free of residual nitrogen. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) guidelines stipulated that a person wait until reverting back to being a Group B diver before flying. Neither the military nor NOAA rules were arrived at using scientifically derived data, but rather by empirical observation of what surface interval resulted in an acceptably low incidence of decompression sickness (DCS). However, the important point is that both of these organizations were willing to accept a certain number of DCS cases under their guidelines. While this number was small—at most 1 to 2 percent—these guidelines incorporated a degree of risk that would not be acceptable to the general public.

In 1989, the Undersea and Hyperbaric Medical Society held a workshop on the issue of flying after diving and attempted to reach a consensus on what constituted a safe surface interval. The problem was that there was no hard, scientific data on how long a

GEORGE STEVENS

diver needed to wait before flying in order to minimize the risk of DCS. After much discussion, workshop participants analyzed DAN accident data from 1987 and looked at divers who experienced signs and symptoms of DCS during, or immediately after, flying home. They found that almost all of the divers who suffered onset of DCS while flying had flown within 24 hours of their last dive. The vast majority of divers who experienced symptoms despite a greater than 24-hour surface interval were felt, on retrospective study, to have had some symptoms prior to flying.

Based upon this analysis, the consensus of the workshop was that the recommended time between a diver's last dive and his or her flight home—for someone who has made multiple dives over several days—should be 24 hours.

I Have to Lose an Entire Day?

While this was only a recommendation, it rapidly became accepted as gospel among many resorts and dive operators. This caused a conflict. Divers felt that they were being denied a day of diving, and resorts feared that they would be exposed to potential liability if they allowed guests to dive within 24 hours of their scheduled departure. This resulted in significant

pressure from the diving industry either to produce data backing the 24-hour recommendation, or to change the guidelines.

In 1991, DAN issued a statement clarifying its position on flying after diving. It stated that there should be a minimum surface interval of 12 hours before flying in a commercial jet. The statement went on to say that divers who make multiple dives for several days, or who make dives that require decompression stops, should strongly consider extending their surface interval. This placed the responsibility of deciding how long to wait between diving and flying squarely on the diver, while acknowledging that there was currently no data to support any specific surface interval prior to flying.

Testing the Theories

It was around this time that DAN set out to obtain hard data on how long a diver should wait after diving in order to minimize the risk of DCS triggered by exposure to altitude. Test divers were subjected to a chamber dive, and then exposed

Driving After Diving

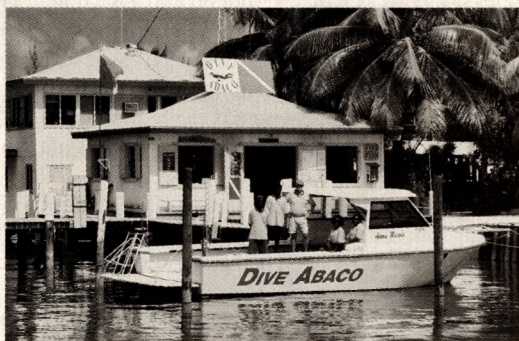
Even if you don't fly after diving, it still is possible to have DCS caused by exposure to altitude. A situation in which driving after diving involves passing through, or over, mountain passes should be thought of as if it were an airplane flight, with the same 12-hour minimum recommended waiting period. After all, the issue is not flying after diving, so much as it is altitude exposure after diving. Any activity that exposes the body to a reduced atmospheric pressure—mountain climbing or driving home through the Rockies—increases a diver's risk of DCS. Driving a car through a 7,000-foot-high pass exposes the diver to the same conditions as being in a 747 at 39,000 feet—without the vacuum-sealed bag of peanuts.

to hypobaric conditions and evaluated for symptoms. The first dive profile tested was to 60 feet for 55 minutes. The results from this series of tests showed that at surface intervals up to 10 hours divers still experienced symptoms of DCS when exposed to simulated altitude conditions. However, no symptoms of DCS were seen in subjects who had a surface interval of 12 hours or longer. These results appear to support the recommendation of a 12-hour surface interval for divers who do a single dive, or several single-dive days, during a vacation.

Subsequent tests involved an initial dive to 60 feet for 55 minutes, followed by a second 60-foot dive for 20 minutes with a one-hour surface interval in between. Later profiles added a third 60-

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Dive Computers and Flying After Diving ▶ by Jon Hardy

Dive computers can be useful tools when dealing with flying after diving, but most are not. Different computers have different ways of dealing with flight, including:

- **Arbitrary countdowns of 12 or 24 hours.** These are simply clocks reminding you of the 12- or 24-hour rules; they perform no calculations.

- **Calculation to desaturation.** These computers actually calculate the time to total desaturation and use that as the time to fly. Very conservative, but more realistic than the arbitrary 12- or 24-hour timekeepers.

- **Calculations to a level consistent with the computer's model for going to the altitude of the cabin on a commercial jet.** This is the most useful and practical method.

Most dive computer manufacturers have taken the easy, less effective way out by simply using the arbitrary countdowns as the time to fly. It seems amazing, with all the calculations that dive computers can do under water, that all they can do on the surface is count minutes.

The following computers actually calculate and display time-to-fly in one of the two methods described above:

- Mares Genius
- Orca Marathon and Phoenix
- Sea Quest EON and Solution
- U.S. Divers Monitor 2 and 3
- UWATEC—all models

If you dive and fly a lot, we recommend using one of the above dive computers in a careful and realistic manner: use the data, but do not ride the edge.

Whatever data is provided by a dive computer, that data needs to be read, understood and acted on by the user. You should understand that dive computers will not violate or make any adjustments for not following their time to fly readings.

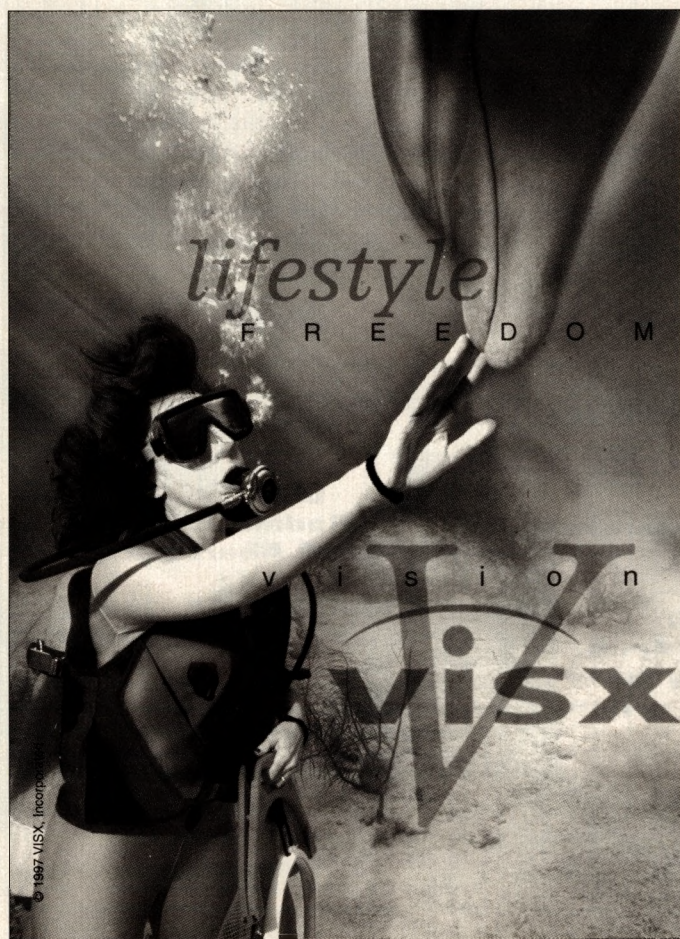
foot dive for 20 minutes, again after a one-hour surface interval. Divers exposed to hypobaric conditions mimicking a commercial airliner at altitude after the two- and three-dive profiles experienced symp-

toms of DCS at surface intervals up to 15 hours. This could be interpreted as supporting DAN's recommendation of a surface interval longer than 12 hours for divers who make multiple dives.

A Conservative View

Michael Emmerman, director of the Special Operations Support Group and an independent researcher who has worked and published extensively on the subject of flying and diving, feels that the recent DAN research is significant. While being careful to acknowledge the limitations of the DAN data—these were chamber dives and the profiles were very specific—Emmerman feels that it is not unreasonable to make some assumptions from the data that would carry over into real-life diving situations.

Most researchers agree that chamber dives are less strenuous than open-water dives. Subjects in a chamber are not exercising, are usually well-hydrated, and are not exposed to cold—all factors thought to play a role in DCS. Therefore, Emmerman feels that the 16-hour surface interval identified in the DAN multi-dive studies as being a safe window prior to flying is probably too short for a diver who has completed multiple open-water dives. If one were to add an additional 50 percent to this interval, then we're back to the 24-hour recommended surface interval. Emmerman says further research is needed in this area before definite answers are known and accepted as scientifically valid, but (Continued on page 101)



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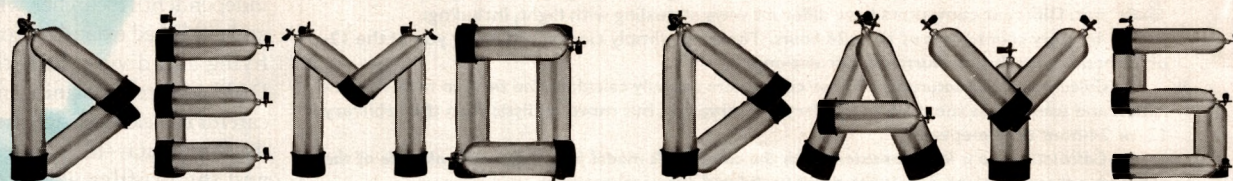
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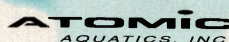


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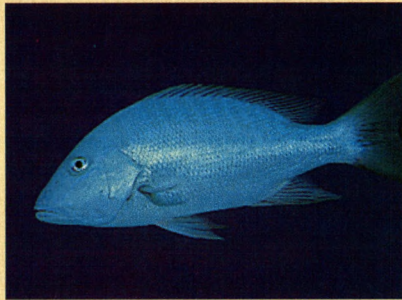
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A MARINE LIFE IDENTIFICATION QUIZ by Reef Environmental Education Foundation

Caribbean Reef Fishes

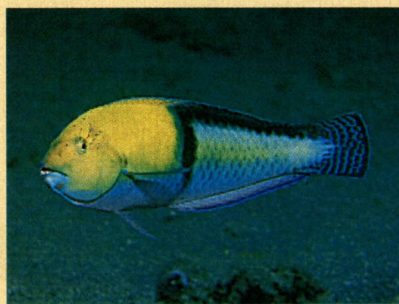


1. Species: _____
Family: _____

During a reef dive in the Caribbean you are typically surrounded by more than a hundred species of fish. Your dive will be greatly enhanced if you learn to identify the fish that you swim with. Here are 10 commonly sighted species. Give yourself 6 points for each correct species name, and 4 points for each correct family name. The answers and an **Expertise Scale** are located on page 78. Good luck.



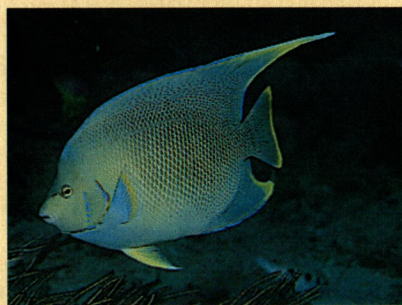
2. Species: _____
Family: _____



3. Species: _____
Family: _____



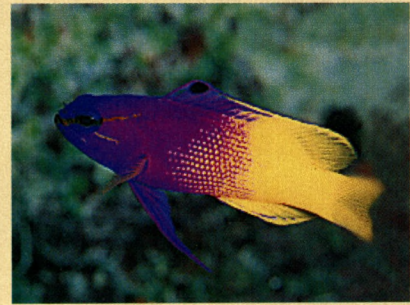
4. Species: _____
Family: _____



5. Species: _____
Family: _____



6. Species: _____
Family: _____



7. Species: _____
Family: _____



8. Species: _____
Family: _____



9. Species: _____
Family: _____



10. Species: _____
Family: _____

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REEF QUIZ

ANSWERS

1. mutton snapper
snapper family
2. jackknife fish
drum family
3. yellowhead wrasse
wrasse family
4. barred hamlet
sea bass family
5. blue angelfish
angelfish family
6. yellowtail snapper
snapper family
7. fairy basslet
basslet family
8. Spanish hogfish
wrasse family
9. glasseye snapper
bigeye family
10. trumpetfish
trumpetfish family

EXPERTISE SCALE

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 0-30 | You need to hit the I.D. books |
| 31-60 | Reef pro |
| 61-80 | You probably know more than your dive instructor |
| 81-100 | Doctor of ichthyology |

Identification Tips

1. There are four species of snapper in the Caribbean that have silver to gray bodies, but only mutton snapper displays a prominent body spot on its side. If you remember the spot as "the button on the mutton," it's easy to recognize the species under water.
4. Hamlets, members of the sea bass family, closely resemble members of the damselfish family in size and shape. Hamlets, however, have a flat head profile compared with the more rounded heads of damselfish. Hamlets, like all sea bass, have triangular pupils. Those of damselfish are round.
5. The blue (pictured) and queen angelfish are so similar in size and color that they are regularly misidentified by divers. The queen can be easily distinguished by a solid yellow tail and an obvious blue circular marking on the forehead. Another identification clue is distribution—the range of the blue is limited to Florida, Bermuda and the western fringes of the Bahamas. The queen inhabits these areas, as well as the entire Caribbean basin.
9. There are only two members of the big-eye family commonly sighted in the Caribbean: the glasseye snapper and the bigeye. Glasseyes always display silver barlike markings on their sides. Bigeyes are a uniform reddish color.

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REEF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOUNDATION ONLINE

If you enjoy learning about the marine life of Florida, the Caribbean, Bahamas and Gulf of Mexico, there is no better place to access fish facts than from REEF's web site at www.reef.org. The wealth of fish species distribution and abundance data collected by volunteer survey divers over the last seven years is now available to the public. This is the same information used for the past two years by scientists, marine life managers and environmental organizations.

The unique database, housed at the University of Miami, was jointly developed and funded by The Nature Conservancy and REEF. A visitor can access reports keyed to species, family, geographic region or even to one of over 900 specific dive sites. REEF volunteers can also access statistics of their personal surveys by simply entering their membership number. Not only can they review their own life lists, but also sighting data from each dive destination, as well as any of the reef locations they have surveyed.

The REEF web site also provides other learning and entertainment features, including interactive fish quizzes, photo galleries, past newsletters, a list of future REEF Field Surveys and fish identification classes, and a popular "chat room" that fields a visitor's marine life related questions and observations. Of course, there is plenty of information about the Reef Environmental Education Foundation itself, including how to become a contributing member or a volunteer survey diver.

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(305) 451-0312 <http://www.reef.org>



Three AF-SLR Housings

Leading the pack of the new generation of AF-SLR cameras is the Nikon N90s. We review three underwater housings that let you take it with you. ► Text & photography by **FRANKLIN VIOLA**

The competition to build a user-friendly, affordable underwater housing for the N90s is fierce among manufacturers. Here is part one of the results of our testing of the waterproof cases currently outfitted to utilize this awesome image creating machine.

AQUATICA A90

CONSTRUCTION► Cast aluminum. PRICE► \$2,000. PORTS► Optical acrylic and optical glass. PRICE► 6-in. dome port, \$260; 60 mm macro port with focus, \$355; 105 mm extension ring, \$176. PORT MOUNTING SYSTEM► Bayonet. TTL STROBE CONNECTION► Nikonos V-type. DISTRIBUTED BY► Nikon Inc., (800) NIKON-US.



Best ergonomic design • Optical viewfinder mounted in rear • Mode selection control locks down • Focus selector control • Change lenses through front port •

Internal camera tray with focus selector assembly



Lacks autofocus lock control • Lacks exposure compensation control



The Aquatica A90 has the best overall ergonomic design of all the housings we tested. Well-placed controls and sturdy handles make this housing very comfortable even for those shooters with small hands. The handle-type strobe arm mounts create a very balanced system for either macro or wide-angle photography. In addition, two threaded holes on top of the A90 allow for the attachment of a small macro strobe or aiming light.

For the most part, the controls require one-hand operation. The mode selection control (which allows access to exposure mode, flash mode, film ISO and motor drive) is spring-loaded and locks down when engaged. This allows you to adjust the command input dial with the same hand. The A90 also features

a focus selector to change the camera from manual to single autofocus and continuous autofocus. The focus selector knob, located on the right side, operates very smoothly in manual mode and locks out quickly when using a lens in autofocus. This knob also works as the zoom control, but the lens must remain in autofocus. The aperture knob, located on the left side, also operates very smoothly. The A90's metal aperture gears attach easily to all lenses.

The optical viewfinder/magnifier is mounted in the rear of the housing instead of screwing into the camera eyepiece. Therefore, it does not have to be removed when changing film. Aquatica offers a range of interchangeable ports, all of which have openings large enough to allow you to change lenses through the front of the housing. In testing the macro port, we found it difficult to align the focus gear on the lens (Nikkor 105 mm AF) with the gear in the port. We also found the focus knob on the port exterior too small to grip. (Note: Aquatica's choice of a bayonet port system makes this housing incompatible with the screw-on ports of its other camera housings.)

ASK YOUR LOCAL DIVE SHOP!

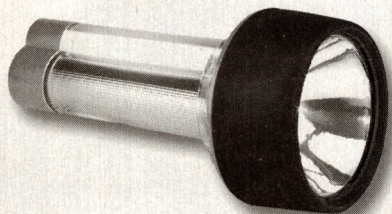


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Battery compartment is sealed from the electronics. Aim the strobe and illuminate your subject's colors with the optional Mini C-Lite and Lite Bracket #4073.



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A unique feature is the A90's removable internal camera tray with the focus selector assembly attached. Even if you remove the camera between lens changes, there is no realignment required. N90s cameras fitted with the Nikon MF-26 databack fit into the A90 housing. However, none of the MF-26 functions are accessible. To utilize the MF-26 while under water, you can purchase the A90 with mechanical back (list \$2,074) or with the computer back and LCD display (list \$2,800).

Two major misses with the A90 is its lack of an autofocus lock control and an exposure compensation control. To get around the autofocus lock dilemma, you may use the focus knob with the clutch gear on the Nikkor 60 mm AF and 105 mm AF to disengage autofocus.

For all other autofocus lenses, you can switch the focus selector in and out of autofocus. A crude method of obtaining exposure compensation (important in adjusting TTL strobe output) is to change the camera's film ISO setting (same method as required with Nikons V). Or, you can purchase the mechanical or computer back to access the MF-26 databack.

Finally, we were pleased to see that Aquatica has improved its TTL hot-shoe which had been unreliable on previous SLR housings. The new TTL bulkhead connector (Nikonos V-style) plugs into the hot-shoe via a telephone jack. This unique design allows you to replace the entire unit (bulkhead connector and hot-shoe) in the field. Listed at \$165, it is affordable to carry one as a spare.

IKELITE N90

CONSTRUCTION► Clear polycarbonate. **PRICE**► \$700. **PORTS**► Optical acrylic. **PRICE**► 6-in. dome port, \$125; 60 mm macro port with focus, \$125; 105 mm macro port with focus, \$125. **PORT MOUNTING SYSTEM**► Locking piston seal. **TTL STROBE CONNECTION**► Ikelite-type. **DISTRIBUTED BY**► Ikelite Underwater Systems, (317) 923-4523.



Clear view of controls and seals •
Autofocus lock control • Mode
selection control locks down •
Meter selection control locks down • Black

back reduces sunlight glare



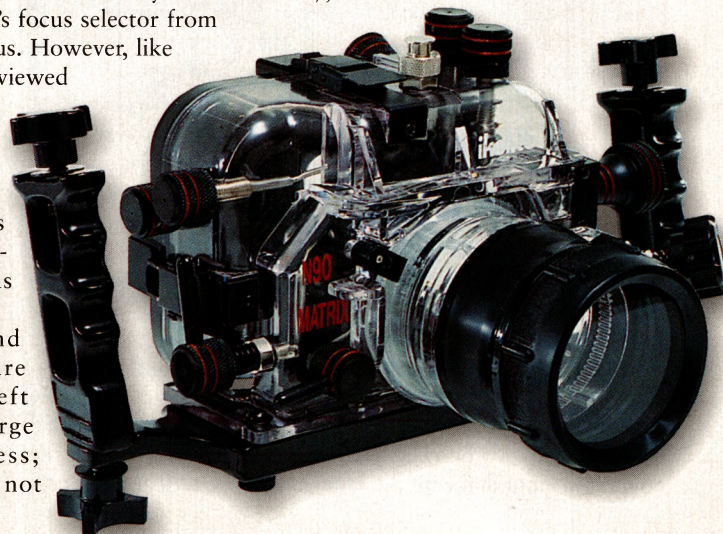
Bulky design • Aperture and
focus gears are plastic

While larger in size than aluminum housings, the advantage to Ikelite's clear polycarbonate construction is the ability to glance inside to inspect the seals and view the camera controls. The handle-type strobe arm mounts create a very balanced system for either macro or wide-angle photography. Ikelite's N90 housing features most of the important camera control functions, but does not allow you to change the camera's focus selector from manual to autofocus. However, like the NX-90 Pro (reviewed next issue), this housing offers an autofocus lock control (located on right front) which is the best way to control autofocus lens searching.

The focus and aperture knobs are located on the left side. They are large and easy to access; however, they do not

operate as smoothly due to Ikelite's plastic gearing (inside the housing and on the lens). The focus knob also works as the zoom control, but the lens must remain in autofocus.

For the most part, the controls require one-hand operation. The mode selection control (which allows access to exposure mode, flash mode, film ISO and motor drive), as



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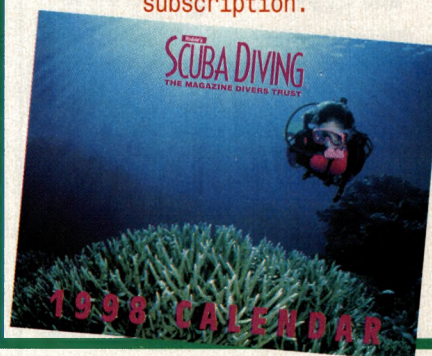
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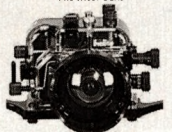
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well as the meter selection control (matrix, spot and center weight), is spring-loaded and locks down when engaged. The exposure compensation control (which doubles as the camera's on/off lever) also locks in position when engaged. These controls allow you to adjust the command input dial with the same hand. A new spring on the shutter release has been installed to improve the firing sensitivity.

Ikelite's contoured black back greatly reduces sunlight glare, making the housing excellent for shooting in bright shallow water. This back also allows plenty of room for cameras fitted with the Nikon MF-26 databack, though none of the MF-26 functions are accessible. The optical viewfinder/magnifier screws directly into the camera eyepiece, like the Miniflex N9BFDL (reviewed next issue), and must be

removed to change film.

Ikelite offers a range of interchangeable ports and has developed a new safety port lock assembly that ensures the port cannot be bumped open. The clear case allows for visual inspection of the port O-ring seal and shows you that it has not extruded during installation. Port extension rings are not available; therefore you must purchase a separate port for the Nikkor 60 mm AF and 105 mm AF lenses. The good news is that Ikelite ports are equal in optical quality and cost 75 percent less than those for the aluminum housings.

Finally, be careful when opening the lid snaps (rear housing latches). They seal extremely well and do not require additional locking devices. However, they snap open with enough force to draw blood when a finger gets in the way.

NEXUS MASTER F90D

CONSTRUCTION► Cast aluminum. **PRICE**► \$1,750 **PORTS**► Optical acrylic (dome) and optical glass (macro) **PRICE**► 6-in. dome port, \$360; 60 mm macro port without focus, \$320; 105 mm macro port with focus, \$600. **PORT MOUNTING SYSTEM**► Screw-on. **TTL STROBE CONNECTION**► Nikonos V-type. **DISTRIBUTED BY**► Anthis USA, (206) 775-3359.



Extremely small and compact
• Optical viewfinder mounted in rear
• Autofocus lock control
• Window on back to view MF-26 (databack)
• Durable glass macro ports
• Lenses can be changed through front port



Focus selector control difficult to align
• Focus control does not disengage when operating autofocus
• Exposure mode, exposure compensation and meter controls are small
• Viewfinder illuminator control is small and recessed

After Sea & Sea's NX-90 Pro, the Nexus F90D was the smallest and most compact housing we tested. It too is well designed, comfortable to grip and operate. The handle-type strobe arm mounts create a very balanced system for either macro or wide-angle photography.

The Master F90D features many important Nikon N90s control functions, plus the ability to change the camera's focus selector from manual to single autofocus to continuous autofocus via a lever on the front. However, we found this control

more difficult to align with an N90s camera than when using the same control featured on the Aquatica A90 or Subal's Miniflex N9BFDL. The focus



knob, located on the left side, operated very smoothly in manual mode; however, it does not disengage (as does Aquatica's or Subal's) when using a lens in autofocus.

Therefore, when shooting a lens fitted with a focus gear in autofocus mode, the camera drives the lens and the focus linkage assembly of the housing as well. Although the focus motor in the N90s is fast, Nikon did not design the camera for prolonged use with such additional strain. For this reason, you may prefer to shoot in one mode only, autofocus or manual. Autofocus lens searching can be controlled since the Master F90D features an autofocus lock control. This control is conveniently located on the right side below the shutter release. The focus knob then becomes a zoom control for autofocus lenses with varying focal lengths.

The aperture knob, located on the left side, also operated very smoothly. But, like that on the Sea & Sea NX-90 Pro, it is rather small and awkward to

**Coming next issue
in Viewfinder:
Reviews of Sea
& Sea's NX-90 Pro
and Subal's
Miniflex N9BFDL
housings.**

reach. The Master F90D's metal aperture gears attach easily to all lenses.

An optical viewfinder/magnifier is mounted to the rear of the Master F90D housing. Although a complementing diop-ter must be screwed into the camera eyepiece for proper focusing, it does not have to be removed when changing film. Nexus offers a range of interchangeable ports (screw-on mounts), all of which have openings large enough to allow you to change lenses through the front of the housing. While a macro port with focus control is available for use with the Nikkor 105 mm AF lens (the focus control on the housing accesses the Nikkor 60 mm AF lens), we found Nexus's compact macro port system more conducive to shooting in tight spaces. Again, lack of focus control on this small port is not a problem since the Master F90D has autofocus lock control.

N90s cameras fitted with the Nikon MF-26 databack fit into the Master F90D housing. Although none of the MF-26

functions are accessible, there is a viewing window that allows you to monitor any preset functions.

The Master F90D does not require two-hand operation to access the camera's command input dial since the control functions such as exposure compensation, exposure mode and meter pattern screw down and lock. The knobs for these controls are small, however, and would be difficult to operate while wearing cold-water gloves or mitts. Another control that is rather small and hard to reach is the recessed viewfinder illuminator control.

Finally, the Master F90D features two bulkhead strobe connections. The right socket, located next to the EV control, is wired to the hot-shoe for TTL strobe operation. The left socket, also wired to the hot-shoe, is for manual strobe operation only. Nexus utilizes Nikon's SC-17 TTL hot-shoe in the Master F90D, with a disconnect plug so that the TTL hot-shoe/bulkhead assembly (list \$200) can be replaced in the field. 

RSD field editor Franklin Viola continues his review of AF-SLR housings in our next issue.

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FIJI

(Continued from page 56)

Accommodations ►

While Eco Divers and Jean-Michel Cousteau share a similar ideology when it comes to conservation, they are at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to accommodations. The Cousteau resort has minibars and bathrobes in the rooms, while Eco Divers arranges for divers to stay at economy hotels. Taveuni boasts variety, from simple guesthouses to expensive, all-inclusive diver resorts.

Also in the region are the private island resorts of Matagi (now spelled Matangi), Laucala and Qamea, where guests stay in intimate, traditional thatched-roofed huts called bures (BOO-rays).

OUTER ISLANDS

For hard-core divers with serious wanderlust and a credit card to back it up, one of Fiji's live-aboards is a smart choice. Live-aboards have almost exclusive domain over the Koro Sea in central Fiji, and the Lau Group in the remote southeast. Since each island and atoll is surrounded by

fringing and patch reefs, the four live-aboards that ply these waters allow access to a limitless choice of dive sites.

The Diving ►

Ngau (*ehn-YOW*), Fiji's fifth largest island, has no resorts and is the sole province of live-aboards. It is also the home of Nigali Pass, and live-aboards have cultivated a warm relationship with the local chief who can grant divers permission to dive the waters. For the diver who wants to go where no one else has been, this is the place.

Magic Mountain off Namenelala is a prime example of bommie diving. Perched on the edge of a sheer wall, the base of the bommie at 120 feet is one of only two spots around Fiji where a resident school of blotch basslets is known to reside. Batfish, barracuda and hammerheads cruise the drop-off while schools of reef fish flow over the pinnacle like a shimmering waterfall. There is a fan-encrusted swim-through at about 70 feet, and flashlight fish provide unique entertainment on night dives.

Namenelala is also the site of North Save-a-Tack, said by some to be one of Fiji's most consistently exciting dives.

Accommodations ►

For \$1,000 per night, per couple, guests at

resorts like Wakaya can hobnob with the rich and famous, and be treated to pretty much anything they could want—from private picnics on deserted beaches to night dives at 2 a.m. Mantas cruise the channel, hammerheads prowl the drop-off outside the lagoon, and divemasters promise you'll see both if you dive these waters for a week.

If you're willing to forgo the resorts' golf courses and horseback rides, live-aboards cost less. The newest addition is the Aggressor Fleet's 106-foot catamaran, the *Fiji Aggressor*. It takes 16 passengers and six crew on week-long trips, departing from the Jean-Michel Cousteau Fiji Island Resort on Vanua Levu.

The 102-foot *Sere-ni-Wai*, which caters to 10 passengers with a crew of five, departs from Suva. Operated by veteran captain Greg Lawlor, the trips generally run seven to 10 days, although Greg will agree to longer trips. The 120-foot *Nai'a* serves 18 guests with a crew of 12 for seven- and 10-day trips departing from Lautoka, north of the international airport. The 85-foot *Matagi Princess II* accommodates up to a dozen guests for four- to seven-day trips departing from Matagi, adjacent to Taveuni. It tours the Somosomo Strait and Ringgold Reef. ☺

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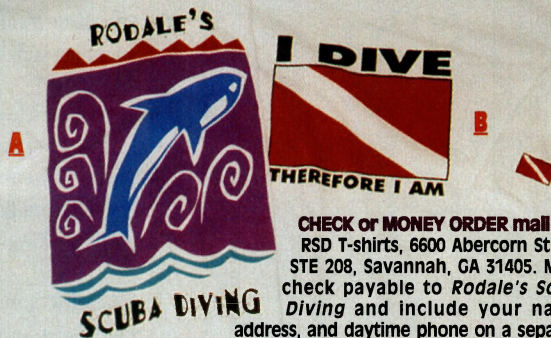
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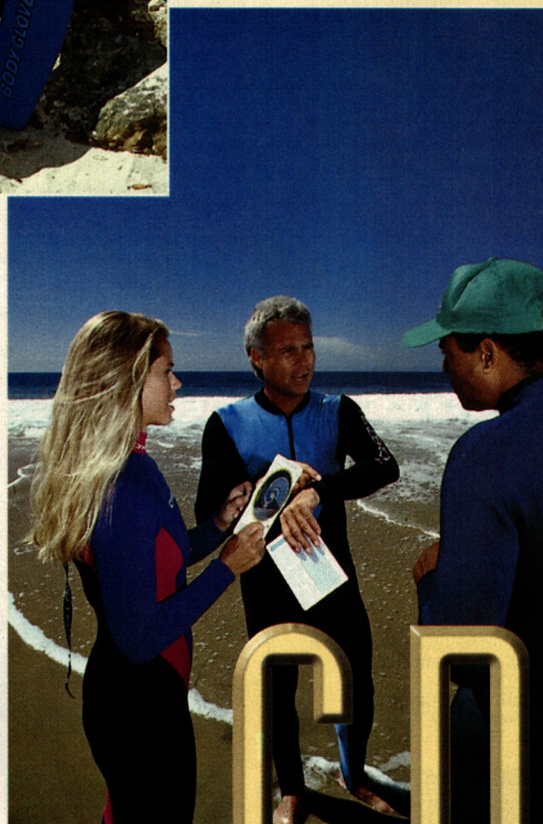
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Remember when you took your first scuba certification course? Whether you've only recently become a certified diver or if you've been diving for years, chances are one thing's the same—your instructor was a vital source of information for you as you took your first fin kicks toward becoming a diver.

These days, dive instructors are not only responsible for teaching people to dive, but are also asked to help customers and students make decisions on what brand of equipment to purchase, which travel destinations offer the best diving or what specialty courses to take. For the typical dive instructor, "instructing" is just one of many important roles.



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PADI International, the most recognized name in dive training worldwide, has been training divers to be leaders and professional educators for more than three decades. The company has successfully created an instructor training program that develops dive professionals who are not only model educators, but who are also in demand by dive retailers and resorts all over the world. It's a fact that dive industry employers look for PADI credentials when staffing their operations.

In today's changing dive marketplace, being a good instructor often isn't enough. Modern dive stores and resorts need professionals who can teach diving in the morning, and then lead dive trips or work in the store in the afternoon. Someone who understands basic business concepts and how to serve today's demanding customers

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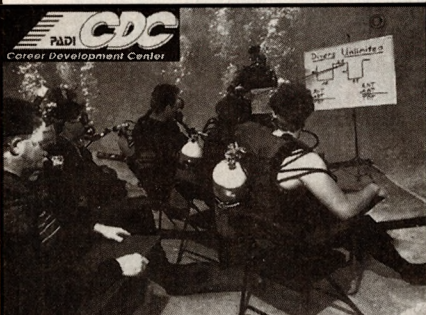
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The *Moon Dancer* offers three different Red Sea diving itineraries: north, south and deep south. Peter Hughes representatives meet you in the Cairo airport for the transfer flight to the resort town of Hurghada, *Moon Dancer's* home port. During the cruise, make four to five dives a day on pristine reefs, walls and ergs (sea mounts).

At the end of the cruise, bid farewell to *Moon Dancer* and fly to Cairo. Ancient history comes alive as you experience the famed Museum of Antiquities. Tour the Pyramids and Sphinx, and then explore Cairo. After an overnight, make the ten-hour direct flight back to North America.

BOOK IT ► Eight-night packages, including Cairo, are \$2,395 pp/do; ten-night packages, \$2,995. Airfare not included. For reservations and information, contact Peter Hughes Diving, your dive travel specialist or travel agent. Peter Hughes Diving: phone (800) 9-DANCER (932-6237) or (305) 669-9391. Fax (305) 669-9475. E-mail: dancer@winnet.net. Web: www.peterhughes.com

boats that ply Egyptian waters. But most are primitive vessels for European divers who prefer to "rough it." Finding the right Red Sea liveboard used to be a challenge for North Americans. If you're a gringo holding out for the right combination of reliability, comfort, adventure and quality service, wait no more. Now there's *Moon Dancer*.

A MOON DANCER PASSENGER RAVED ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE:

"In a word, the diving is WOW! I was overwhelmed by the fish life and continuously amazed by the quality of the diving. Excellent seamounts and colorful corals." What did he like best about *Moon Dancer*? The reply: Brand-spanking new boat with beautiful blond teak. In the cabins,

provide unparalleled living space and headroom for even the tallest of divers. All cabins feature private shower, toilet and individual controls for air conditioning and music.

The Peter Hughes touch is evident throughout the *Moon Dancer* operation: outstanding comfort, service, cleanliness, food and beverage. Spacious lounge and dining area with panoramic view from two sides. Sun deck with chaise lounges. Air conditioning and ultraviolet-purified water throughout. Specialty scuba instruction. Nitrox service. E-6 film processing. VHS and 8mm editing. Thirty-two inch video screen. A broad selection of rental gear, including Nikons and u/w video cameras.



Photos by Louis J. Sie



Little Cayman & Brac Reef Beach Resorts

The Hardest Part is Deciding Between the Two

What's on the checklist when dive addicts home in on one resort for a dive vacation? Top ratings from other divers. A healthy marine environment. Prolific fish life. Stunning submarine walls like Bloody Bay. The chance to take impressive underwater photos. A friendly dive operation that runs like the proverbial Swiss watch, where the boats and service are second to none. The chance to make some world-class advanced dives.

MEMORABLE FOOD AND FARE

Therein lies the problem: Reef Fantaseas Tour and Travel offers not one but two dive destinations and resorts that topped the charts in the 1997 *Rodale's Scuba Diving Readers' Choice Awards*. Reef Divers—the dive center at both Little Cayman Beach Resort and Brac Reef Beach Resort—scored first and fourth respectively in the top five dive operators in the Caribbean. Not to mention the incredible edibles: both Little Cayman and Brac Reef Beach Resorts pulled down Top 10 honors in the world for best food. The islands Little Cayman and Cayman Brac both scored in the top five in the Caribbean for health of marine environment, walls, photography and advanced diving. And they both ranked in the top 10 dive destinations in the Caribbean.

THE RESORTS

Located on private beaches, Little Cayman Beach Resort and Brac Reef Beach Resort are intimate, upscale getaways that cater to divers and snorkelers. At both resorts, two-story, "treetop height" buildings reflect the quaintness and charm of the Caribbean. Each is nestled in lush tropical foliage and landscaped gardens.

Little Cayman Beach Resort has 12 luxury oceanfront rooms and 28 pool-view rooms. Brac Reef Beach Resort offers 40 deluxe pool-view rooms. Each guest room has attractive tropical decor, tiled or carpeted floors, patio or balcony, air conditioning, TV and private bath.

At both resorts, the restaurants offer dining in a casual atmosphere, both indoors in air-conditioned comfort or outdoors in an al fresco setting. Meals are buffet-style. Poolside bars overlook the beach. Both resorts feature special meeting

Little Cayman and the *Capt. Keith Tibbetts*, the 330-foot Russian destroyer sunk as an artificial reef off Cayman Brac. The REEF package costs \$1,343 per person, double occupancy, and includes accommodations, meals, seminar, materials, 2-tank dives on each field study day, and three tanks on days with no seminars.



BOOK IT ➤ For reservations, information and travel connections for Little Cayman and Brac Reef Beach Resorts, phone (800)

rooms, each with 1,000 square feet of room and audiovisual facilities for up to 60 people. And new at Little Cayman Beach Resort is the fitness and game center, plus Nitrox diving.

WHERE'S THE REEF?

Want to learn about Caribbean marine life while doing your part for the ocean environment? From Oct. 4 to Oct. 11, 1997, the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) will use Little Cayman Beach Resort as a base for a fish census of



327-3835 or (813) 323-8727. For a stunning virtual tour of the resorts and Reef Divers on the World Wide Web go to www.bracreef.com and www.littlecayman.com.

Mike Ball Expeditions

Paradise Sport Setting A New Standard For Papua New Guinea



In the
1997 RSD
Readers' Choice

Awards, Papua New Guinea scored big: Divers rated it in the top five in a host of Indo-Pacific categories, including fish life, big animals, health of marine environment, walls, wrecks, shore diving and advanced diving.

Mike Ball Dive Expeditions is no stranger to the winners' circle either. Over the past four years, Australia's largest and most successful dive operation has topped the charts in a variety of "best" categories: top dive experiences worldwide, dive staff, boats, most environmentally sensitive, value for diving dollar—even food.

In 1996, Mike Ball acquired the *Telita*, a 65-foot, 10-passenger vessel considered the "First Lady" of Papua New Guinea live-aboards. Crafted from native hardwoods, she's a pure expression of class and character. In late 1996, Mike Ball decided to expand options for divers who wanted to explore Papua New Guinea. He built a brand-new boat for his "Sport" fleet of live-aboards: *Paradise Sport*. The new vessel is one of Mike's trademark catamarans—100 feet long and 33 feet wide—and is typical of the entire fleet's spaciousness, style and comfort.

Paradise Sport is designed to be the world's best live-aboard, reflecting Mike Ball's 26 years of

experience in dive cruises. The vessel accommodates 20 divers. The boat cruises smoothly at 16 knots with the remarkably stable ride characteristic of Mike Ball's big catamarans.

The speed of *Paradise Sport* also means tremendous range, new diving frontiers for divers in Papua New Guinea, and flexible and unique itineraries.

Paradise Sport offers a huge dive deck with nitrox facilities, lots of camera storage space, a state-of-the-art photo and video lab, and the "Paradise Lounge"—designed expressly for video and slide presentations. Enjoy Papua New Guinea's spectacular scenery from the unique forward observation deck or the upper

exotic fish life, World War II wrecks, shark action, nautilus dives and underwater volcanic activity.

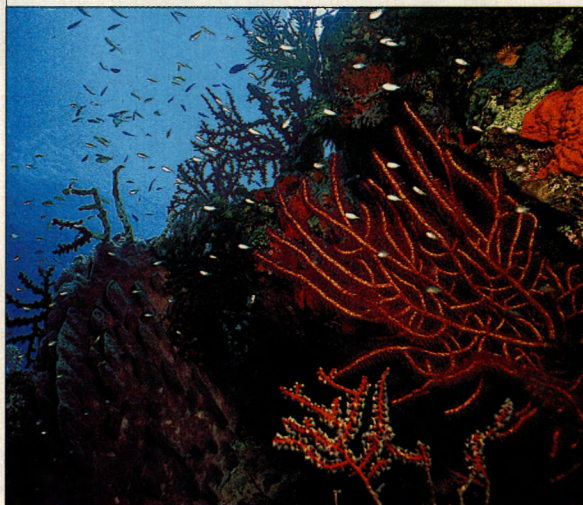
- Milne Bay to Lae—Wreck Special (10 nights in May). The best of Milne Bay reef diving plus extraordinary wrecks.

- Kavieng (7, 8 and 10 nights, June to September). Circumnavigate New Hanover island for big fish, spectacular wrecks, silvertip sharks, and wall, pass and nautilus dives.

- Kavieng-to-Rabaul Special (10 nights in October). The best of Kavieng diving plus the chance to witness the awesome results of 1994's volcano eruption at Rabaul.

BOOK IT ► Contact Mike Ball Expeditions for information on Papua New Guinea cruises aboard *Paradise Sport* and *Telita*. *Paradise Sport* cruises range from US\$1,840 to \$3,433

per person, double occupancy. From North America, contact the Arizona office, phone (800) 952-4319 or (520) 556-9598. E-mail: OzDive@aol.com. Australia office: phone (011) 6177-723022. E-mail: mike.ball@t140.aone.net.au. Web: www.mikeball.com.



sundeck. Savor the sumptuous cuisine either in the dedicated dining room—which seats all passengers—or on the alfresco deck.

Paradise Sport features four Papua New Guinea itineraries:

- Milne Bay (7, 8 and 10 nights, October through April). Typical cruises include East Cape, Nuakata Island, North Coast and D'Entrecasteau Islands with rare and



Dive House, Fiesta Americana

Cozumel's Quality Combination for Divers

From the moment divers set foot in the lobby of Fiesta Americana Cozumel Reef, they begin to appreciate what the resort is all about: the ultimate in comfort, service, convenience and laid-back tropical luxury.

From a diver's perspective, the best thing about the resort is the in-house dive operation. Located on the beach at the Fiesta Americana, Dive House is closer to the best dive sites than any other full-service charter operator. Dive House features a fleet of superb boats, short boat rides, top-quality rental gear and a highly trained professional staff. The quality of the equipment and personnel is state-of-the-art—and second to none in Cozumel. With Dive House, you can speed to Cozumel's best walls and reefs—including Palancar, Santa Rosa, Tormentos—in 10 to 30 minutes.

COZUMEL DIVING: HAVE IT YOUR WAY

With the new Experienced Diver Program (EDP), Dive House will accommodate you on a custom dive boat with divers of a similar skill level. You'll be served by divemasters and crew trained to attend to your specific needs.

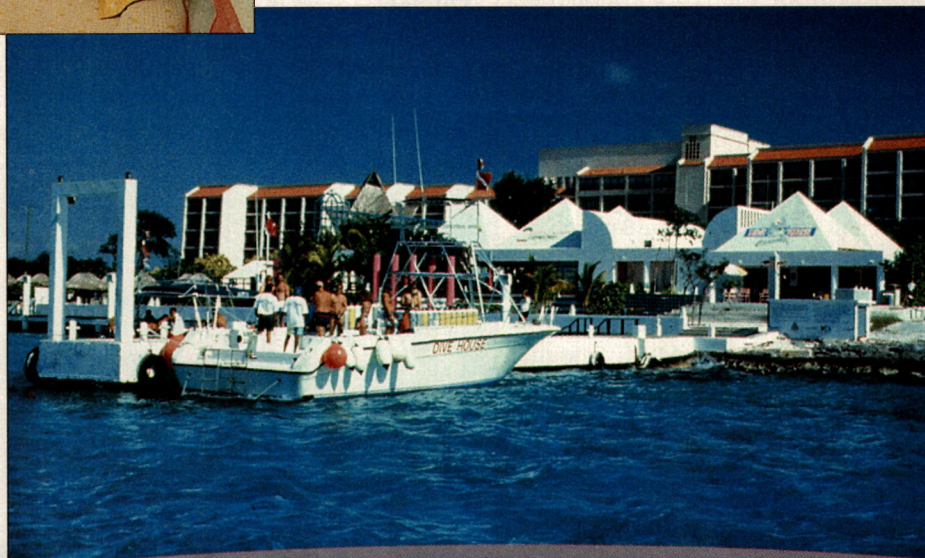
On the boat for the new diver you can improve your skills, safety and enjoyment in the company of divemasters or instructors who cater to your personal requirements. You'll come away a more comfortable, confident and capable diver. On the boat for the intermediate diver, move up to more independence, new dive sites, longer dives and buddies with similar levels of experience and abilities.

Your dedicated divemaster will show you the way to greater flexibility and freedom as you advance in skill. On the boat for the advanced diver, expand your underwater horizons as you enjoy Cozumel's most exotic and challenging dives. Within no-deco limits, make the most of your skills and dive computer. Dive your plan and maximize your bottom time in the company of equally experienced advanced divers.

All Dive House boats are spacious and fast, with small groups

boat dives. Free upgrade to the special "casita" suites at Fiesta Americana (if available) with continental breakfast daily. One free dinner at the resort for stays of four nights or more from Sept. 2 to Dec. 18, 1997. Free round-trip airport-hotel transfers for stays of four nights or more. Free EDP Slap Strap for every diver, courtesy of the Cozumel Quality Combination.

BOOK IT ► Until Dec. 18, 1997, four nights accommodations with three days of two-tank boat dives is \$345 per person/double-occupancy; seven nights with six days diving, \$633. From January 5



Dive House & Fiesta Americana offer divers the best of both worlds—a top-notch dive operation close to Cozumel's best sites and comfortable, convenient oceanfront accommodations.

and custom service. But if you want even more flexibility, upgrade to Select Diver for an additional cost of just \$10 per diver per day. This option guarantees a fast "six-pack" dive boat with captain and divemaster ready to take you where you want to go. Minimum two divers, maximum six.

To inaugurate the Experienced Diver Program, summer and fall specials include: free tanks for shore diving on the days you make

through April 15, 1998, four nights accommodations with three days of two-tank boat dives is \$491; seven nights with six days diving, \$896. For information, reservations and special airfares, phone Island Dreams at (800) 346-6116 or (713) 973-9300. Web: <http://www.islandream.com>. E-mail: info@islandream.com.

Cayman Diving Lodge

Same Island, Yet Worlds Apart

When you're looking for an alternative to the hustle-bustle resorts and tourist diving of Seven Mile Beach, head to the East End of Grand Cayman. There you'll find the Cayman Diving Lodge—and the laid-back island atmosphere and hospitality of yesteryear.

To divers, the East End is 17 miles of untouched paradise. The reefs and walls are—in a word—spectacular. What you find at the Cayman Diving Lodge is peace and relaxation, uncrowded boats, unparalleled camaraderie, and what many call the best diving on Grand Cayman. A vacation means savoring Grand Cayman diving as it once was—an experience of adventure and discovery unspoiled by tourism.

The isolated lodge is located on a private beach with a grand view of

the Caribbean Sea and the barrier reef. With only 10 air-conditioned rooms, Cayman Diving Lodge is small by most standards. The atmosphere is informal and the service personal. The friendly live-in staff of 10 caters to all your needs, from three delicious meals a day to all levels of scuba instruction and three dives a day. Cayman Diving Lodge is a place to regain your old enthusiasm for diving adventure and cozy nights of camaraderie under a starlit sky.

BOOK IT ► For Cayman Diving Lodge, phone (800) TLC-DIVE (U.S. and Canada) for information, reservations and travel arrangements. For a stunning description of the Lodge, visit its web site: www.caymandivelodge.com. Fall special: until Dec. 15, 1997, the

GRAND CAYMAN



seven-night package is only \$884 per person, dbl. occ., for the all-inclusive plan: accommodations, meals and diving.

LIVE-ABOARD

The Maldives

An Indian Ocean Paradise

One of the hot new spots capturing the fancy of globetrotting divers is the incredible Maldives. Located approximately 500 miles southwest of India, more than 1,100 islands are spread out on the placid, dazzling blue of the tropical Indian Ocean.

Almost every island in this vast archipelago is a travel-poster fantasy of exotic tropical delight. Palm-tree-studded atolls are encircled by white sand beaches with surrounding shades of blue water that dazzle the eyes. Below these azure waters are some of the most pristine reefs and greatest fish populations in the world. Dive sites include perpendicular drop-offs, shallow reefs, pinnacles and the adrenaline rush of diving the "cuts" of the atolls. From the tiniest goby to the largest jewfish, in the Maldives you see all of them on almost every dive.

Manta rays abound. Schools of jacks and other open-water marine life often appear in schools that number from 10,000 to 200,000. Unbelievable, but true—this is the Maldives.

Until recently, there were few live-aboard vessels providing American standards of service in the Maldives. The *Manthiri* is an 85-foot cruiser that accommodates 12 guests in distinct comfort, if not luxury. She is fully air-conditioned, and accommodates 12 guests in 6 spacious double occupancy cabins, each with private bath. The Maldives most experienced captain and crew ensure your enjoyment of unforgettable dives and eye-opening island excursions. Be advised



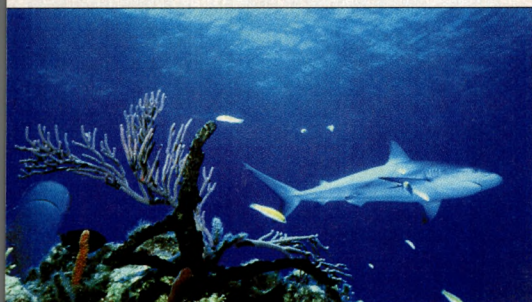
Manthiri

however that trips usually fill up many months in advance.

What are you waiting for? This is world-class diving at its very best. For further information, contact Tropical Adventures Travel, 111 Second North, Seattle, WA 98109, (800) 723-5814, (206) 441-3483, fax (206) 441-5431, e-mail: dive@divetropical.com.

Stella Maris

Escape to the Bahamas' Star of the Sea



If you visit Long Island in the Bahamas, it's likely that half the people at Stella Maris Resort will tell you they are repeat guests. What keeps 'em coming back? The diving: Stella Maris means "Star of the Sea," and the resort is a constellation of world-class diving experiences. Countless reefs and wrecks, shallow and deep. The world's deepest blue hole. The Bahamas' best wall—Conception Island Wall. And Shark Reef—the world's original shark-

feeding experience. Adventure overnight dive trips. Here divers are invited to set the dive schedule before and after arrival. Other elements of the experience lure guests back: the family atmosphere and the Stella Maris state of mind. The welcome and hospitality. Endless stretches of beautiful beaches. Caves, friendly villages and 80 miles of island to explore. Superb food.

Stella Maris is a 3,000-acre tropical estate that covers the north end of Long Island. The resort accommodates 120 contented vacationers. It features a dive operation, marina, airport and its own air service. Accommodations range from rooms to 1-, 2-, 3-, and 4-bedroom bungalows. At Stella Maris, days are filled with scuba diving, snorkeling, fishing the flats and reefs, tennis, excursions around the island,

bicycling, sailing and relaxing with family and friends around swimming pools. Nights are filled with dancing to the "rake and scrape" music of the Bahamas, beach cookouts, cave parties, moonlight cruises, slide shows on the local flora and fauna, and history talks.

BOOK IT ► Through Dec. 21, 1997, the five-night all-inclusive scuba package is \$1,070 per person, double occupancy; seven nights, \$1,499. It includes two to three dives a day, shark dive, accommodations, meals, activities, and round-trip flight from either Fort Lauderdale or Nassau. Phone your travel agent or Stella Maris at (800) 426-0466 or (954) 359-8236. Web: www.stellamarisresort.com. E-mail: smrc@stellamarisresort.com.

MICRONESIA

The S.S. Thorfinn

Discover Truk Lagoon and Micronesia

Captain Lance Higgs conducts a tour: "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome aboard the *S.S. Thorfinn*, the largest live-aboard dive vessel in the Pacific, and one of the largest in the world. You'll notice that a recent major refit maintains this ship at the forefront of live-aboard luxury, space and service.

"At 170 feet in length and with a displacement of 1,100 tons, you are assured of stable, deep comfort. Twenty-two guests can enjoy our big-ship atmosphere and uncrowded luxury. The *S.S. Thorfinn* offers 11 spacious air-conditioned staterooms, each with full vanity, television, video cassette player, indirect lighting, full-length closet, new carpeting and modern decor. Eight cabins have private toilets and showers. Our experienced Micronesian crew of 21 is dedicated to serve your every need.

"Our crew-to-guest ratio of 1:1 is the highest in the Pacific. If you enjoy excellent service, you'll find it on the *Thorfinn*—both in the water and topside.

"Most of the year we cruise Truk Lagoon. Each week aboard the *Thorfinn*, you can dive up to 30 of the 70 magnificent shipwrecks and hundreds of aircraft, remnants of the Japanese Imperial forces that were condemned to a watery grave by the U.S. Naval air attacks during World War II. In June and July we cruise the beautiful outer islands on "Pan-Micronesia Voyages of Discovery" including the far reaches of Truk, Pohnpei, and the Marshall Islands as well as Enewetak and Kwajalein atolls."

BOOK IT ► Truk Lagoon Wrecks Special, Sunday to Sunday, six-and-a-half days diving, five dives a day, \$1,895. Contact Seaward Holidays



Micronesia in Chuuk, phone 011-691-330-3040, fax 011-691-330-4253. Web: www.thorfinn.com E-mail: Seaward@mail.fm.

The Nekton Pilot

Smooth Cruising, Luxurious Accommodations

You've heard the adage "A live-aboard is only as good as the diving it takes you to." In the 1997 *Rodale's Scuba Diving* Readers Choice survey, divers ranked the *Nekton Pilot* among the top five live-aboards on the globe. A savvy diver might infer that the *Nekton Pilot* serves up some of the best diving in the world. That diver would be correct.

Throughout the year, the *Nekton Pilot* cruises on three different Bahamas itineraries. From November to mid-April, it's the Southern Bahamas. Between mid-April and October, the *Nekton Pilot* alternates



between the Cay Sal and Bahama Adventure itineraries. On Southern Bahamas trips, the live-aboard cruises from Georgetown through the Exumas to Rum Cay and the dramatic walls off Conception Island and San Salvador. The Bahama Adventure typifies the diversity of diving in the

northern Bahamas: coral gardens, high-profile reefs, wrecks and walls. The highlight is snorkeling with wild spotted dolphins on White Sand Ridge. On the Cay Sal itinerary, the *Nekton Pilot* ranges between the Florida Keys and Cuba, through

uninhabited islands that encircle a shallow bank. Cay Sal boasts one of the world's highest concentrations of blue holes. Plus, clear Gulf Stream waters bathe spectacular vertical walls that plunge into the ocean.

BOOK IT ► A week-long cruise on the *Nekton Pilot* costs \$1,495. Take advantage of 1997 specials: save \$100 during September and October; between Thanksgiving and Christmas, save \$300. In February and March 1998, Nekton is offering free round-trip air to Georgetown from Fort Lauderdale. Contact Nekton, your dive travel specialist or travel agent. Phone (800) UW-WORLD or (954) 463-9324. E-mail: nekton@nektoncruises.com. Web: www.nektoncruises.com.

MICRONESIA

Continental's World of Diving

Paradise On Sale

Continental Micronesia Airlines serves some of the best scuba destinations in the world: the islands of Micronesia and more. Sister company Continental Airlines serves many other great dive destinations, including Mexico, the Bay Islands of Honduras, Costa Rica, the Galapagos, Cozumel, Bahamas, Hawaii and the Philippines. Together, Continental Airlines and Continental Micronesia fly to more scuba destinations than any other airline group.

Continental Micronesia and Continental Airlines have joined forces to launch "Continental's World of Diving" through their in-house tour operator, Island Adventures. To celebrate "The Year of the Coral

Reef" in 1997, Island Adventures is offering special packages with up to 50 percent savings on Palau, Chuuk, Yap and Pohnpei. For example, the regular price on round-trip airfare to Palau from Los Angeles or San Fran-



cisco and five nights' accommodations is \$1,749 per person, dbl. occ. The Year of the Coral Reef special offers the same package for \$999.

Save 42 percent—\$750 per person—on travel from Sept. 15 to Dec. 15, 1997. Add diving for \$90 a day. For departures from most other U.S. gateway cities, add \$250.

Continental Dive Vacations specializes in live-aboards and group travel. Ask about underwater photo and video seminars, great white shark expeditions, rebreather and nitrox trips, and guided tours with Stan Waterman and Jim Church.

BOOK IT ► Talk to one of the experienced dive specialists at (800) GO DIVING or (800) 463-4846. Or contact the nearest office of Continental Airlines, Continental Micronesia or your local travel agent. Web: www.destmic.com.

FREE DIVE INFO

Simply tear out the reply card, circle the numbers preceding the names of the companies which interest you, fill out your name and address, affix postage, and drop it in the mailbox. You'll soon be receiving information which will help make your diving more enjoyable!

AUSTRALIA

1. DIVE DISCOVERY/REEF EXPLORER
1-800-886-7321 See ad pg. 98

BAHAMAS

2. ABACO BEACH RESORT DIVE CENTER
1-888-478-3525 See ad pg. 99
3. BAHAMAS TOURISM 1-800-866-DIVE See ad pg. C2
4. CLUB MED 1-800-CLUB MED See ad pg. C3
5. DIVE ABACO 1-800-247-5338 See ad pg. 74
6. DIVE DIVE DIVE 1-800-368-3483 See ad pg. 99
7. NASSAU SCUBA CENTRE 1-888-962-7728 See ad pg. 30
8. STELLA MARIS 1-800-426-0466 See ad pg. 72
9. STUART COVE'S DIVE SOUTH OCEAN
1-800-646-3333 See ad pg. 67
10. SUNSKIFF DIVERS 1-800-331-5884 See ad pg. 99
11. UNDERWATER EXPLORERS SOCIETY
1-800-992-DIVE (3483) See ad pg. 05
12. VALENTINE'S DIVE CENTER
1-800-383-6480 See ad pg. 98
13. WALKER'S CAY 1-800-513-5257 See ad pg. 65

BAY ISLANDS/HONDURAS

14. ANTHONY'S KEY RESORT 1-800-727-3483 See ad pg. 19
15. BAY ISLANDS BEACH RESORT
1-800-4-ROATAN See ad pg. 06
16. BAYMAN BAY CLUB 1-800-524-1823 See ad pg. 23
17. CASA ROMEO'S/BAY ISLAND AGGRESSOR
011-504-45-5518 See ad pg. 99
18. FANTASY ISLAND BEACH RESORT
1-800-676-2826 See ad pg. 37
19. LAGUNA BEACH RESORT 1-800-668-8457 See ad pg. 72
20. POSADA DEL SOL/INN OF THE SUN
1-800-642-3483 See ad pg. 30
21. REEF HOUSE RESORT 1-800-328-8897 See ad pg. 62
22. ROATAN CHARTER, INC. 1-800-282-8932 See ad pg. 29

BELIZE

100. GAZ COOPER'S DIVE BELIZE
011-501-26-2892 See ad pg. 98

BERMUDA

23. BERMUDA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM
1-800-821-1199 See ad pg. C4
24. BERMUDA DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM/WRECK
WEEK 1-800-BERMUDA See ad pg. 102
25. BLUE WATER DIVERS 1-441-234-1034 See ad pg. C4
26. FANTASEA DIVING 1-441-236-6339 See ad pg. C4
27. NAUTILUS DIVING, LTD. 1-441-295-9485 See ad pg. C4
28. SCUBA LOOK 1-441-293-7319 See ad pg. C4
29. SOUTHSIDE SCUBA 1-441-238-1833 See ad pg. C4

BONAIRE

30. SAND DOLLAR CONDOMINIUM RESORT
1-800-288-4773 See ad pg. 04
31. TOURISM CORPORATION OF BONAIRE -
BONAIRE DIVE FESTIVAL 1-800-BONAIRE See ad pg. 62

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

32. TRIMARINE 1-800-648-3393 See ad pg. 18

CAYMAN ISLANDS

33. BRAC REEF BEACH RESORT/LITTLE CAYMAN
BEACH RESORT 1-800-327-3835 See ad pg. 68
34. CAYMAN DIVING LODGE 1-800-TLC-DIVE See ad pg. 63

35. DON FOSTER'S DIVE CAYMAN

1-800-83-DIVER See ad pg. 65

36. INDIES SUITES/INDIES DIVERS

1-800-654-3130 See ad pg. 63

37. TREASURE ISLAND DIVERS

1-800-872-7552 See ad pg. 38

COZUMEL

38. CASA DEL MAR 1-800-711-4700 See ad pg. 66

39. DIVE HOUSE 1-800-346-6116 See ad pg. 36

40. DIVE TOURS 1-800-433-0885 See ad pg. 83

41. FIESTA AMERICANA COZUMEL REEF HOTEL
1-800-346-6116 See ad pg. 36

42. ISLAND DREAMS TRAVEL
1-800-346-6116 See ad pg. 36

43. LA CEIBA BEACH AND DIVE RESORT
1-800-711-4700 See ad pg. 66

44. PLAZA LAS GLORIAS 1-800-433-0885 See ad pg. 83

EASTERN CARIBBEAN

45. ANSE CHASTANET 1-888-465-8242 See ad pg. 67

46. HIGHTIDE WATERSPORTS
1-800-513-5763 See ad pg. 99

47. TRINIDAD & TOBAGO TOURISM
1-888-595-4TNT See ad pg. 13

FIJI

48. TRIP-N-TOUR 1-800-348-0842 See ad pg. 58

49. TROPICAL ADVENTURES TRAVEL
1-800-723-5814 See ad pg. 58

FLORIDA KEYS

50. AQUA NUTS/KELLY'S ON THE BAY
1-800-226-0415 See ad pg. 99

51. TAVERNIER DIVE CENTER 1-800-787-9797 See ad pg. 23

HAWAII

52. ECO-ADVENTURES 1-800-949-3483 See ad pg. 98

53. HAWAIIAN DIVERS 1-800-525-PADI See ad pg. 99

MEXICO

54. SUN AND ADVENTURE 1-800-886-9408 See ad pg. 98

MIDWEST

55. BONNE TERRE MINE 1-314-731-5003 See ad pg. 99

PALAU

56. SPLASH 1-800-247-3483 See ad pg. 98

SOLOMON ISLANDS

57. DIVE DISCOVERY/ADVENTURE SPORTS GIZO
1-800-886-7321 See ad pg. 99

58. DIVE DISCOVERY/BILIKIKI CRUISES LTD
1-800-886-7321 See ad pg. 99

TURKS & CAICOS

59. CAICOS ADVENTURES 1-800-513-5822 See ad pg. 71

60. DIVE PROVO 1-800-234-7768 See ad pg. 71

61. FLAMINGO DIVERS 1-800-204-9282 See ad pg. 71

62. OASIS DIVERS 1-800-892-3995 See ad pg. 71

63. PROVO TURTLE DIVERS
1-800-833-1341 See ad pg. 71

64. SALT CAY DIVERS 1-888-725-8229 See ad pg. 71

UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

65. DIVE EXPERIENCE 1-800-235-9047 See ad pg. 25

66. ST. THOMAS DIVING CLUB
1-800-538-7348 See ad pg. 25

67. V.I. DIVERS 1-800-544-5911 See ad pg. 25

DIVE EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

68. D.A.N. 1-800-446-2671 See ad pg. 27

69. PDIC 1-717-342-9434 See ad pg. 83

70. SCUBA SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL
1-800-821-4319 See ad pg. 28

DIVE EQUIPMENT

71. ATOMIC AQUATICS, INC. 1-714-375-1433 See ad pg. 15

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73. FORTE 1-800-500-8292 See ad pg. 68

74. INTERNATIONAL DIVERS
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75. LIBERTY GROUP/GENESIS
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76. SONIFORM 1-619-562-3681 See ad pg. 19

77. UWATEC USA INC. 1-800-951-DIVE (3483) See ad pg. 11

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82. PADI 1-800-729-7234 See ad pg. 20

83. TROPICAL ADVENTURES TRAVEL
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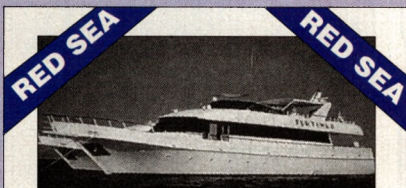
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FLYING AFTER DIVING

(Continued from page 75)

in the interim he feels that the current recommendations are reasonable, and supported by the emerging data.

Extending the Test Group

That more research is needed is not disputed by Bret Gilliam, the current chief executive officer of UWATEC USA, president of Tech Divers International (TDI), and former president of NAUI. But he disagrees with the validity of applying the results of a relatively small number of chamber dives, which have square profiles, to real-life, multi-level recreational diving.

According to Dr. Richard Vann, DAN's research director, there have been a total of 540 chamber dives conducted to date, with 22 suspected DCS hits. Gilliam asks why we should utilize numbers derived from a few hundred subjects in chambers, when there are hundreds of thousands of dives made annually that can provide more accurate and meaningful data? To this end, UWATEC is one of the major suppliers of computers and software being used to compile data for DAN's Project Dive Safety. Gilliam argues that the data that will eventually result from Project Dive Safety—data compiled from actual open-water dives—will be much more meaningful than any chamber dives could be.

Vann agrees that Project Dive Safety—and its European counterpart Project Safe Dive—will add useful information. These ongoing projects aim to obtain information from over one million actual dives. However, Vann points out that even though participants are asked to record pre-flight surface intervals, the flying after diving question is not what the project has been designed to address, and is unlikely to provide any definitive answers.

Vann says that he is looking forward to future studies in wet tanks that will incorporate all the factors present in actual dives—depth, immersion, exercise and compressed air—in a controlled laboratory setting.

So Is It 12 or 24?

So the question remains for divers: How long should you wait before flying after multiple dives? Both Emmerman and Vann, while citing the need for further

research, advocate a "better safe than sorry" attitude and feel that the 24-hour recommendation is appropriate. In the absence of any hard data to the contrary, Gilliam feels that a 12-hour surface interval prior to flying is sufficient. He points out that advances such as computers, widespread use of alternate air sources, and the 15-foot safety stop have all contributed to make diving safer. Many divers are not waiting 24 hours before flying, and if this is so dangerous then why aren't we seeing more cases of DCS? Gilliam asks.

Diving After Flying

How soon after flying into a tropical locale can you safely get in the water? Nitrogen is not the issue here. The question concerns the ways that the aircraft environment affects divers. After several hours of breathing dry, recycled air with a low oxygen content, most of us are dehydrated, tired and irritable. Diving under these conditions predisposes a diver to DCS and to making mistakes.

It is up to you to decide when you're sufficiently recovered from your trip to dive safely. Each diver must consider his own condition—fatigue, dehydration, physical fitness—as well as the type of diving planned when making this decision. The urge to get into the water as soon as possible is understandable, but it's better to wait and dive safely than to take unnecessary risks and endanger your health and vacation.

Your Bottom Line on Bottom Time

So the question still remains. How long should a diver wait after completing multiple dives before flying? In many cases this is almost a moot point. Most live-aboards only plan a half day of diving on the day before coming into port. If divers rushed directly from the boat to the airport, it might be possible to fly with a surface interval of less than 24 hours, but this would be a challenge. Many resorts will likewise not schedule dives for guests in the 24 hours prior to their scheduled departure. Most guests are willing to abide by this and spend their time at the bar or on the beach while giving their gear a chance to dry before they pack.

But this is not always the case. And given a situation where you have control over the surface interval before flying after completing multiple dives, I would choose to wait 24 hours. Based on the available data, I feel that this provides for the least amount of risk, while not significantly inconveniencing the diver.

It is equally understandable if a diver, looking at the same data, were to choose a shorter surface interval prior to flying. This, after all, is what DAN's guidelines were designed to address when they were written. The ultimate decision and responsibility lie with you. 

BAY ISLANDS, HONDURAS

(Continued from page 50)

dropping from 25 feet to more than 1,000. The dome-shaped seamounts rise to within 45 feet of the surface and attract pelagics like schooling jacks and sea turtles. Many of the budget dive shops use the traditional dories—long, narrow, canoe-shaped outboards—that will hold a surprising number of divers. Larger shops have traditional, wide-hulled dive boats.

Accommodations ►

Spartan colonial inns for the backpacker set; lodge-style accommodations for dedicated divers.

Diversions ►

Utila Town is a bustling small city with wide cement sidewalks for road. The vehicle of choice here is a 4-wheel ATV, but you can walk the whole thing in an afternoon if you choose. The city has several small banks and general stores, but little in the way of tourist shopping. The main road (a glorified concrete sidewalk) dead-ends into the mercilessly short runway.

For nightlife, wander into any bar along main street, but for weekend dance action there is only one place: Salon 07, an open-air disco where the beer is cheap and the music loud.

Cayos Cochinos

This cluster of six islands and small cays is the closest to the mainland yet the least developed of the Bay Islands. The islands and all reefs within a five-mile radius are a national biological reserve managed by the Smithsonian Institute and patrolled by the Honduran navy. Other than a few private homes, a research station and a single dive resort, the only residents are Garifuna fishermen who feed themselves by hand-line fishing.

The large islands of Cochinos Grande and Cochinos Pequeno are surrounded by small, sandy cays, submerged seamounts and fringing reefs that are the healthiest and most active in the Bay Islands. This wealth attracts day boats from other islands and live-aboards, but there is only one resort on Cochinos Grande, which was grandfathered into the reserve. It's the ultimate in away-from-it-all because once the day boats and the live-aboards are

gone, you practically have the entire archipelago to yourself. Enjoy.

The Diving ►

Fringing reefs start in as little as five feet of water, and there are classic vertical walls from 20 to 100 feet. The most explosive diving is on the seamounts where tiny tropicals mix it up with wandering pelagics. On almost every site, you'll experience the full range of Bay Island diversity.

Accommodations ►

The one dive resort here is a collection of rustic bungalows set in the hills and basin of a beachfront mountain valley on Cochinos Grande.

Diversions ►

Pull up a lounge chair and watch the sunset turn into an incredibly starry sky. Hike a mountain trail up to the lighthouse for a 360-degree view of the islands, then hike down to visit the Garifuna fishing village. Take a kayak around to one of the small cays for an afternoon of white sand, shady palms and pure solitude. ☉



Keith Phillips is an RSD associate editor.

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Dealing With Entanglements

Caught in an awkward entanglement? It happens under water, too. When it does, here's how to deal with it.

STEP 1 Be Prepared. Carry two knives, mounted far apart—say, on your calf and your chest—so you can always reach a knife no matter what part of you is entangled. Keep them sharp. Mount them so you can reach at least one knife, preferably both, with either hand. One knife should be a small one with a sharp tip that can get into tight spots. A serrated edge is most effective

on large ropes like lobster pot lines and thick clumps of kelp and seaweed. Shears or line cutters work best on monofilament. Next, streamline your gear. Mount your leg knife on the inside of your leg. Carry your snorkel in a knife pocket or a BC pocket, or leave it ashore. Mount your first stage with the swivel down (if yours has one). Clip instruments close to your body. Don't use gate hooks (where the hook swings open against a spring) as they can hook line and seaweed. Tape down the ends of your fin straps and mask straps.

Don't take unnecessary gear.

STEP 2 Be Aware.

As you swim, pay attention to your progress through the water. Starting to slow down? Maybe you're dragging something. Too often, divers don't pay attention to their own motion (or lack of it) through the water, and keep finning until they are well and truly hooked. Notice the problem early, however, and it will be easier to deal with.

STEP 3 Be Cool. If you do get caught, don't try to

kick free; you'll only make things worse. Don't twist your body around to see what has caught you; you'll only wrap it around you. Instead, move as little as possible. Signal your buddy for help and let him deal with the fishing line, kelp, whatever, while you remain motionless. No buddy? Feel carefully with your hands until you locate the problem. Above all, don't panic and start struggling. If you can't reach the entanglement, you'll have to take off your gear. (That's why you practiced this in training.) Remember, don't take the regulator out of your mouth, and don't interrupt your breathing. Keep an eye on your depth gauge.

STEP 4 Be Free.

Don't immediately reach for your knife. Seaweed and kelp can usually be broken with your hands. Lines can often be lifted free. If a knife is called for, you will probably need both hands—one to hold the stuff tight and one to cut it. (That's a good reason for carrying shears.) Remember: saw big lines and cut or snip the tiny stuff. To cut monofilament, make a loop in one hand and snap the loop with the knife. Don't cut toward your free hand if you can avoid it. And don't nick your hoses.



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